DISCUSSIONS ON ART

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FLEMISH PAINTING

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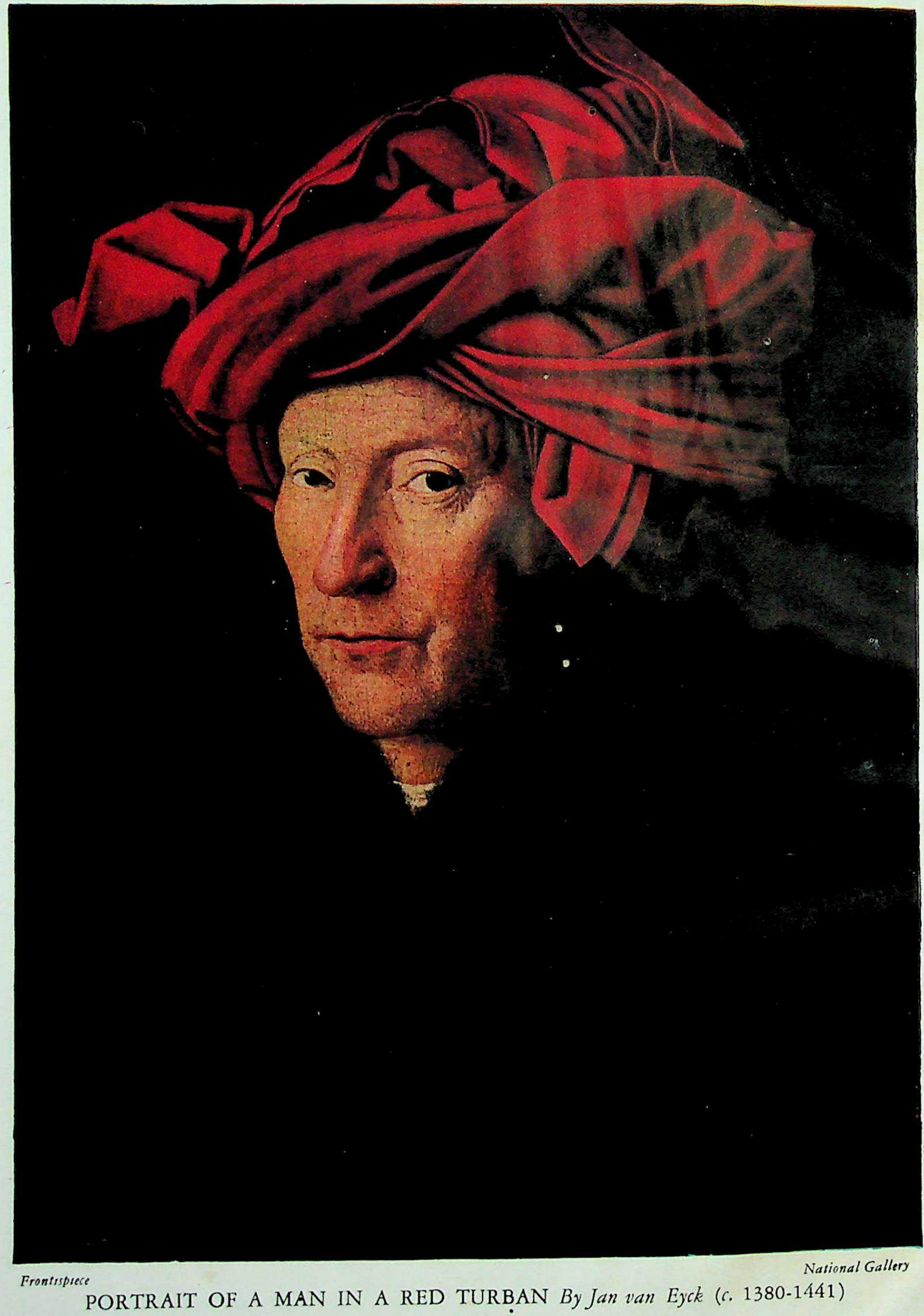

Frontispiece

National Gallery

PORTRAIT OF A MAN IN A RED TURBAN *By Jan van Eyck* (*c.* 1380-1441)

Original $10\frac{1}{4}'' \times 7\frac{1}{2}''$

FLEMISH PAINTING

TEXT BY

EMILE CAMMAERTS

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PROFESSOR OF BELGIAN STUDIES AND INSTITUTIONS
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

WITH 44 PLATES IN COLOUR AND MONOCHROME

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The authors of the text, however, have been given full freedom to discuss or (where space permits) illustrate any painter whom they claim as part of their subject. There has been some inevitable overlapping at the point where art transcends nationality, with the result that a few famous painters are in more than one of the volumes.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Before drawing an outline of how Flemish Painting developed it is necessary to clear certain misunderstandings and to explain the reasons that favoured or hampered the artistic life of the country to which this School of painting belongs.

The country is not only Flanders, but the whole of Belgium, including the Walloon, or French-speaking, provinces. The reason why the name Flemish has for so long been applied to Belgian art is twofold. The first is that this School became well known all over Europe at a time when Belgium was not yet recognised as an independent nation. The second is that the majority of its greatest masters were born and bred in the northern provinces and bore Flemish names. Although it would be useless and somewhat pedantic, at this stage, to insist on replacing the old name by a new one, it should be pointed out that the "Flemish School" has not a regional but a national character, in so far as the term national can be applied, for instance, to Italian and French art.

It is the artistic expression of the life of a people talking two languages but possessing common characteristics and a common tradition which has exerted its influence on the whole country from the Middle Ages to the present day. The centre of artistic activity passes from Bruges, Ghent, Brussels and Tournai in the 15th century to Antwerp in the 17th. Brussels, Antwerp and Liége share the honours to-day.

The very fact that Belgium has two languages and two literatures has perhaps contributed to her artistic efflorescence. This form of expression could be shared and understood by all, in the South as well as in the North. It is, with music, a bond of union between the two main regions which divide the land. The Belgian people have always shown more interest in painting than in the other arts. They have good reason to do so because their painters have been able to express, in every period of history, the main characteristics of popular temperament, the trend of realism which runs through its religion, the love of colour and display, and the homely scenes of everyday life.

Art historians generally agree that, after the Italian, the Flemish School is the most important in Western Europe. This opinion may surprise those who realise the size of the country compared with that of her big neighbours. It is founded on the fact that painting flourished in the Low Countries in the 15th century, while it had produced no outstanding work anywhere else in Northern Europe. For three centuries Belgian and, later, Dutch artists obtained an outstanding position in Europe and exerted their influence in France, England and Germany. Petrus Christus, Van der Goes, Memlinc, Moro, Van Cleef, Rubens and Van Dyck had English, French, German, Spanish and even Italian patrons. There was a constant exchange of influences between Flanders and Italy, and although Italian artists retained their reputation for a long time, they were not able to compete against the rising fame of Rubens and Van Dyck. The only masters who could be compared with them were Velazquez in Spain, and Frans Hals and Rembrandt in Holland.

The relationship between Dutch and Flemish art is not always clearly understood. Some people confuse them altogether, others seem to think that there is no connection between them. What happened was that, *Already Published*

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The relationship between Dutch and Flemish art is not always clearly understood. Some people confuse them altogether, others seem to think that there is no connection between them. What happened was that, in the two first centuries of their development, the two Schools were merged into one. All the principalities extending from the Zuiderzee to the Somme were ruled by the same princes, the Dukes of Burgundy, and from the cultural point of view formed one unit. Artists from the north and from the south came to the Court of the Dukes and painted in the same style.

The distinction between the Northern and Southern Netherlands dates from the 16th century revolution against Spain. At the end of the religious and political struggle which followed, the Southern provinces, including Antwerp, which were Catholic, remained under the rule of Spain, while the Northern provinces, which had been the centre of Protestantism, achieved their political independence and formed the Republic of the United Provinces. The latter became the modern kingdom of Holland, as we know it to-day, while the former, after important territorial losses, were recognised as the independent kingdom of Belgium in 1831. Under a different political régime and the influence of a different Church, Holland assumed characteristics which are strongly reflected in the paintings of Rembrandt, his predecessors and successors. Popular ideas about the relationship between the two Schools are therefore misleading. They should neither be considered as two separate movements nor as the same movement, but rather as a united movement which takes two different directions at a certain period in history, as two branches of almost equal importance, growing from the same tree.

The influence of political and economic conditions on the development of culture should not be exaggerated, but it cannot be ignored. For instance, the Flemish School shows extraordinary vitality during the first half of the 17th century, in spite of the fact that the port of Antwerp was closed to world trade, and that the country had become, to all intents and purposes, a possession of the Hapsburg dynasty. On the other hand, these adverse conditions are certainly partly responsible for the decadence of the School of Rubens, Van Dyck and Jordaens during the following century. At this time the lead passes to England, who had been hitherto largely dependent on foreign—particularly Flemish—painting. We must wait until the renaissance of Belgian painting, in the 19th century, before realising that the fire of art and culture had been smouldering during this long period of depression, and that the old tradition had been preserved in spite of all appearances to the contrary.

The cursory way in which modern Belgian art has been dealt with in this short sketch of the history of the Flemish School should not give the reader the impression that it does not occupy an important position among other modern foreign schools. It has been found impossible to render justice here to its wealth and variety because, in Belgium as everywhere else, emphasis must necessarily be laid on the period when the contribution of national art to European art is outstanding.

This period ranges, in the Belgian provinces, from 1400 to 1700. During these three centuries the achievements of Flemish masters and the recognition they received abroad are out of all proportion to the size and population of the country. These masters stand in the forefront of European culture. Unless due importance is attached to their influence, it is impossible to understand the artistic developments which occur, at the same time, in England, France and Germany. Even Italy, the traditional centre of artistic activity, is not entirely independent of it. In the 15th century, for instance, the rise of the Venetian School was strongly affected by Flemish innovations. Neither did Van Dyck find any rival who could challenge his reputation during the years he spent in Genoa, Rome and other Italian cities.

It has frequently been said that the two great qualities of Belgian painting are, on the one hand, a remarkable sense for light and colour, and, on the other, a tendency to emphasise realism.

The first remark is obvious, whatever period we choose to consider. The Venetian School of the 16th century is the only one which can be compared with the Flemish School from that particular point of view. The draughtsmanship of the Van Eycks and their successors is comparable with that of their Florentine contemporaries, but their colouring is incomparable. Apart from Titian, none of the great masters of the Italian Renaissance shows the astounding sense of colour of Rubens or young Van Dyck. When comparing the modern art gallery in Brussels with other modern galleries, the traveller cannot fail to notice this characteristic, which often redeems some second-rate work from vulgarity.

The second remark must be strongly qualified. The use of such words as " realism " is as dangerous in art criticism as in politics. It must be considered in relation with the period and its style, and be placed in its proper setting. It is nevertheless true that, although the mood of the Flemish 15th century is more austere and expresses a deeper religious attitude than that of the Italian 15th century, this does not prevent the Van Eycks and some of their successors from attaching as much importance to natural features as does Botticelli.

The reactions of the 16th century Flemish School to Italian influences point in the same direction. While some " Italianists " seek their models beyond the Alps and try to imitate, somewhat clumsily, the grand manner of Raphael and Michelangelo, others, like Brueghel, remain impervious to Southern influence and devote their genius to the expression of popular life, showing a sense of observation and characterisation which has not been surpassed in modern days. Even Rubens, the master of pomp and circumstance, retains this quality in his most ambitious designs. This contrast between the grand manner which he favours and the realistic treatment which is his natural mode of expression may sometimes be difficult to reconcile for those who have adopted classical standards, but it is nevertheless the reason of his profound originality. Without it the Flemish masters of the 17th century would never have been able to give a new lease of life to the Renaissance, while in Italy it became more and more the prey to sentimentality.

We may therefore trace, in every period of Flemish art, a particular delight in life and movement, a combination of keen observation and constructive power, and a reluctance to sacrifice these to sheer imagination or to a vague idealism which, however attractive it may be, no longer expresses faithfully the truth as they see it.

I. THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY: RELIGIOUS PAINTING

THE Flemish painters of the 15th century are usually called "Primitives." This is only correct if we consider the chronological sequence of the various periods. It is quite misleading if we consider the technique and the style of their works, which, from the beginning, reach a high degree of perfection. As a matter of fact, one of the most startling features of this period is that its first great picture is an unequalled masterpiece. It is the large polyptych in the church of St. Bavon, in Ghent, called the *Adoration of the Lamb* by Hubert † (*c.* 1370–1426) and Jan van Eyck ‡ (*c.* 1380–1441).

The subject is a free interpretation of some verses of the seventh chapter of Revelation, especially those which mention "a great multitude . . . standing before the throne and before the Lamb" and crying, "Salvation unto Our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb." Above, we see Christ enthroned between the Virgin Mary and St. John and two groups of angels; below, the Lamb standing on the altar, in the midst of a flowery meadow, surrounded by saints; while pilgrims and hermits, on one side, and warriors and "good judges," on the other, approach the scene.

According to a tradition which was accepted until recently by most critics, the picture was begun by the older of the two brothers, Hubert, and completed, after his death in 1426, by Jan, who was at that time Court painter to Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy and ruler of the Low Countries. It has been the custom to attribute to Hubert all the inside panels of the triptych, as well as a number of unsigned works which show certain similarities with them, such as the *Three Marys* in the Cook Collection, Richmond, and the *Crucifixion*, in Leningrad. Hubert was considered, as the greater of the two masters, endowed with a mystical sense and an imaginative power which his younger collaborator did not possess. This theory was, however, strongly attacked by some Belgian critics fifteen years ago, and the existence of Hubert has even been questioned.

We need not here go into the details of this controversy, which rests mainly on the fact that, apart from the incomplete inscription painted on the frame of the polyptych, there are no signed works by Hubert, while there are at least nine pictures signed by Jan. In the same way, there are only four inconclusive references to Hubert in contemporary documents, while we can follow the life of Jan, who undoubtedly cut an eminent figure at the Court of the Duke of Burgundy: the latter entrusted him with secret diplomatic missions to Spain and Portugal. There is, however, important documentary evidence against giving Hubert a purely mythical character. He may not have had such a large share in the great work as was thought on the strength of a certain reading of the inscription recorded in the 17th century, but if he only designed it, he should be ranked among the first representatives of the School. Unless some new discoveries are made, it is therefore probable that future critics will uphold Hubert's reputation, while insisting on the greater importance of Jan.

The polyptych was inaugurated with due pomp and ceremony in 1432. It is rightly considered as the foundation stone of Northern European painting. No previous work could be compared with it from the point of view of colouring, design and composition. It is unique for the conception of the landscape and the scrupulous treatment of the slightest detail. It combines the qualities of the altar-piece and of the miniature, for it does not lose its power when being looked at from a distance. It has that rare quality of being both decorative and intimate.

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† Plate 9 ‡ Frontispiece, Plates 24 and 25

Italy had already, it is true, given a great school of painting to Europe. The 14th century frescoes of Giotto and his pupils had westernised Byzantine art a century before the Van Eycks began to paint, and Fra Angelico was their contemporary. But Fra Angelico and Giotto belong to the Middle Ages, while the Van Eycks belong to the pre-Renaissance. The former translate religious visions, they teach the Gospel; the latter, while wishing still to glorify God through their works, are less mystical in their outlook. The angels in Angelico's work are truly supernatural. They float in a translucent atmosphere in translucent colours, like "spiritual bodies." Van Eyck's angels are still spiritual, but they have the spirituality of choir-boys, and their heavy vestments are very much of this world. The point of view is different; the mediaeval Italian artists start from their heavenly visions and express them in human forms; the Flemish painters of the pre-Renaissance start from their observation of the world surrounding them, and build their religious vision with this earthly material.

We should not compare the art of the 15th century in Flanders with that of Angelico or Lippo Lippi, but with that of the first masters of the Italian Renaissance, such as Pollaiuolo and Castagno, who tried to reconcile their Christian inspiration with a purely realistic outlook. Here we may say that the Flemings succeeded in realising a synthesis, while the Italians failed to do so, and soon adopted a new style which was to lead them to a well-ordered classicism.

How could such an accomplished masterpiece as the *Adoration of the Lamb* arise at the very origin of an artistic movement? Does not such a "miracle" contradict all we know of the gradual development of human activity? Several explanations have been offered which, taken separately, are unsatisfactory, but which, taken together, may show that the rise of the 15th century school is not so sudden as it appears at first sight.

The usual explanation according to which the Van Eycks "invented oil painting" may be dismissed, because we know that a number of painters had already used oil before their time. Unfortunately most of these works have been destroyed, and those left to us do not reveal Eyckian characteristics. Melchior Broederlam painted in tempera, in 1399, on the shutters of an altar-piece preserved in Dijon, an *Annunciation*, a *Visitation* and a *Flight into Egypt* which seem nearer to the Italian Giottesque style than to that of the Van Eycks.

It is in the illuminated manuscripts of the period that we can trace the origin of their art. Charles V, King of France, and his two brothers, John, Duke of Berry, and Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy and Count of Flanders, were great patrons of the arts, and gathered the richest collection of illuminated manuscripts ever seen in Europe. Most of these, such as the *Très Belles Heures du Duc de Berri* and the *Très Belles Heures de Jean de France*, were executed from 1380 to 1405 by artists from the Low Countries. The latter book is also known as the *Hours of Turin* because it was preserved in the Turin Library and partly destroyed in the fire of 1904. The reproductions made before that time and the parts of the book still in private collections reveal a remarkable likeness to the style and colouring of the pictures attributed to the Van Eycks, in the treatment of drapery, for instance, the balance of the composition, the development of the landscape. It has been suggested that these works were painted in their studio. Since the *Book of Turin* was completed in 1413, this would show that the technique of the Van Eycks was already highly developed before they undertook their great work, and that the origin of the Flemish School of painting might be traced to the Franco-Flemish School of miniaturists which flourished at the end of the 14th century.

When all is said, many things remain unexplained, such as the exact use made by the Van Eycks of the new oil medium and the way they succeeded in transferring to large-size paintings the technical achievements realised in illuminated manuscripts. The rule of continuity is not entirely broken, but the wonder we feel when we place the *Adoration of the Lamb* in its historical setting is not diminished.

All the signed works are by Jan van Eyck, and were executed from 1432, date of the inauguration of the *Lamb*, to 1439, two years before the master's death. They include, as well as portraits, the well-known *Virgin of Canon Van der Paele* (in Bruges), a small sepia drawing representing *St. Barbara* (in Antwerp), and another small picture, the *Virgin at the Fountain* (in Antwerp).

The first of these works is typical of the School, and a few pictures of the period representing a similar subject, such as the *Virgin with Chancellor Rolin* (Louvre), have been attributed to Van Eyck on the strength of their likeness with it. The Virgin is sitting between St. Donatian (the patron of the church for which the votive picture was painted) and St. George (the patron of the Canon who commissioned it). The donor is kneeling on the right, holding his prayer-book and spectacles. It is a very penetrating portrait, revealing the passionate personality of the sitter, transfigured by ardent worship. Once more, the contrast between the religious atmosphere of the whole scene and the direct realism of the portrait strikes us as the dominant feature of the work.

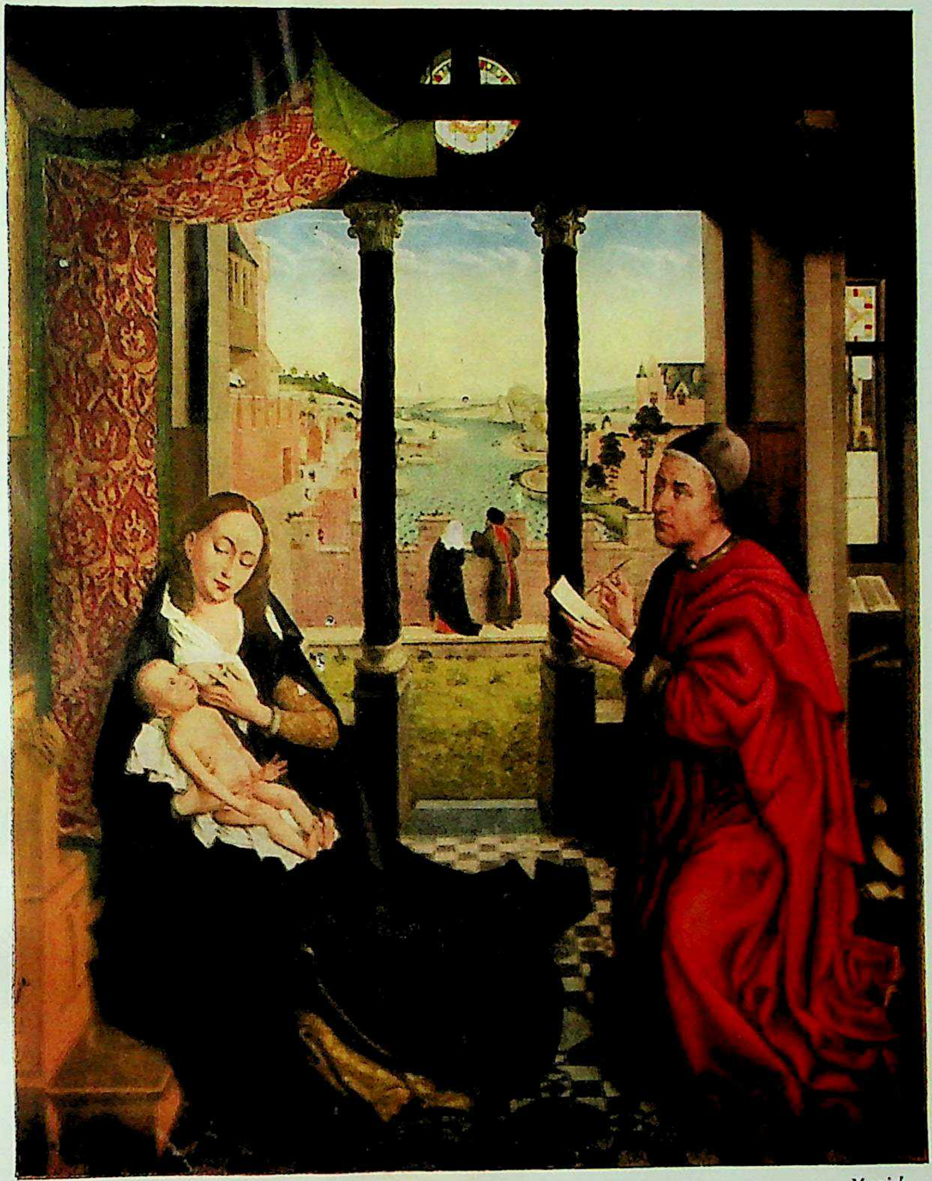
In the *St. Barbara* the same contrast appears between the girlish figure of the young martyr and the active scene in the background, where we see workmen engaged on the building of the large Gothic tower which is to be her prison. The *Virgin at the Fountain*, on the other hand, is almost as mystical as a Fra Angelico, apart from the deeper colouring. Angels, flowers, brocade canopy, sparkling fountain, are remote from the world. This lovely little panel has been a thorn in the flesh to the critics who wished to confer upon Hubert alone the imaginative quality which may be found, to a larger or smaller extent, in all the religious works of the School.

Petrus Christus, or Christi (*c.* 1410–*c.* 1473), is the only artist who can be directly connected with the Van Eycks. He was born about 1410, and settled in Bruges in 1444. His principal work relates an episode of the life of St. Egidius, patron saint of the corporation of the goldsmiths. The saint is not shown in his spiritual glory, but engaged in his usual trade—a goldsmith before his counter. Petrus Christus is also the first painter to receive a commission from England. His portrait of Edward Grimston, in Lord Verulam's collection, has not left this country since it was painted in 1446.

Although the Van Eycks may be considered as the founders of the School, it would be a mistake to imagine that their influence brought about complete unity of style. As in Italy, the art of the period has various local centres. Almost at the time when Jan van Eyck worked in Bruges, where Philip the Good held his Court, other masters worked in other towns, in the Walloon as well as in the Flemish part of the country.

We know that Robert Campin (1375–1444) had an important workshop in Tournai, where he died in 1444. His name has been the subject of many discussions, because there are no pictures which can be attributed to him with absolute certainty. He has been identified with the "Master of Flémalle," so called because certain paintings bearing the same character had been preserved in the abbey of Flémalle, and also with the "Master of the Mérode altar-piece," because an altar-piece of a similar style still exists in the Mérode Collection.

These ascriptions are not without solid foundation. Campin favours a peculiar perspective which allows him to place in full view objects scattered on a table or a bench. In



Munich

Plate 2

ST. LUKE DRAWING THE VIRGIN *By Roger van der Weyden* (1400-1464)

Original 55″ × 42½″

one of the panels of the Mérode altar-piece, for instance, we see on the table between the Angel of the Annunciation and the sitting Virgin, an open book and a vase with a branch of lilies. The same care for detail is noticeable in another panel, where St. Joseph is engaged in making mouse-traps, while the passers-by can be seen in the street through the open window. The Virgins and female saints of Campin are different from the girlish type adopted by Van Eyck. The long, oval face is very typical, and can be recognised in the *Reading St. Barbara* (in Madrid), in the *Virgin and Child* (in Frankfurt), and in the *Virgin and Child with a Fire-Screen* (in the National Gallery).

Campin's colour is as brilliant as that of the Van Eycks, but he does not possess their imaginative power, as is shown in the treatment of the *Holy Trinity* (Frankfurt). On the other hand, he is the first master of the period to associate religious subjects with interior scenes and to fill such scenes with an intimate religious atmosphere. Van Eyck's Virgins sit enthroned in great churches, Campin's remain at home. It is to the same master that we owe the motive of the open window, used incidentally by Van Eyck in his Arnolfini portrait (National Gallery), and so frequently exploited later by Memlinc. This motive is essentially characteristic of the spirit of the period which, although deeply religious and devotional, never loses touch with the realities of this life on earth. While Virgins and saints stand in the foreground, we are not allowed to forget that men are still moving in the background, engaged on their wise or foolish errands.

If the origins of the School of Bruges must be sought in the *Books of Hours*, the influence of sculpture cannot be ignored in the works of Campin and of his great follower Roger de la Pasture, better known under the name of Roger van der Weyden † (1400–1464). We know that this master worked as an apprentice to Campin in 1427 and was received among the master painters of Tournai in 1432. There is also evidence that he was already settled in Brussels, as painter to the town, in 1436. This rapid advancement led certain critics to doubt his Walloon origin, which is, however, sufficiently established. He seems to have been more influenced by Van Eyck than by his own master.

Apart from a few portraits and four large panels which decorated the court of Brussels Town Hall, and which were destroyed in the bombardment of 1695, all Roger's works are religious. His approach to the Gospel is more human and dramatic than that of the Van Eycks, and no artist in the North has ever interpreted the Passion with more restraint and intensity. The *Mater Dolorosa*, in the National Gallery (an attribution), gives only a faint idea of the sorrow expressed by the faces and attitudes of the men and women taking part in the great *Descent from the Cross* (Madrid) and *The Entombment* (in the National Gallery, now attributed to Dirk Bouts). There is certainly a great deal of realism in the treatment of the dead body of Christ, but its cruelty is justified by the grievous pain shown by the assistants. Roger's large polyptych, *The Last Judgment*, was commissioned by Chancellor Rolin (the same for whom Van Eyck painted his small Madonna) for the Hospital of Beaune, near Dijon, founded in 1443. This apocalyptic vision stands comparison with Van Eyck's treatment of the same subject and is superior to Memlinc's (Danzig). It is the theological and artistic counterpart of the *Lamb*—Judgment, beside Redemption. The influence of the theologians who inspired and directed the work of most painters of the period is also well marked in the triptych of *The Seven Sacraments*, in Antwerp.

Van der Weyden painted a number of *Virgins Nursing the Child*. Among those which can be safely attributed to him is the *Virgin Painted by St. Luke* (in Munich), and the *Medici Virgin* (in Frankfurt), so called because it may have been commissioned during Roger's voyage to Italy, in 1449–

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† Colour Plate 2, Plates 7 and 26

1450, when he also painted the portrait of the famous Lionello d'Este. These are not the last tokens of appreciation which the Flemish artists of the period received from Italian patrons. For instance, in 1468 Josse van Ghent was invited to come to Italy by the Duke of Urbino. He remained at his Court and his works show a strange combination of Flemish and Italian characteristics.

Another local School deriving from the same artistic movement was that of Louvain started by Thierry or Dirk Bouts † (*c.* 1415–1475). This painter was born in Haarlem, in Holland, about 1415, and came to Louvain, which was already in those days a centre of learning. We find him settled there, in the middle of the century, engaged on a large polyptych which is preserved in the Church of St. Peter. The central panel represents the Last Supper, while on the others are painted the Prophet Elias fed by an angel in the desert, the celebration of the Jewish Passover, the meeting of Abraham and Melchisedec and the Jews eating the manna in the desert—all subjects symbolically connected with the Eucharist. This great work is another landmark in the history of early Flemish art. The composition and execution show certain Eyckian influences as well as a knowledge of Roger van der Weyden's work; but Bouts remained deeply original. He pushed further than any of his contemporaries the power of creating a religious atmosphere, without allowing his characters to display any apparent emotion.

He is the sternest representative of the School. The fact that he came from Holland may partly account for this calm austerity. It is preserved in the most dramatic scenes which he was called upon to paint, such as the gruesome *Martyrdom of St. Erasmus* (also in the Church of St. Peter) and the *Wrong Judgment of Emperor Otto* (Brussels), which he had only partly completed when he died in 1475.

Bouts has left us a number of pictures of the Virgin, such as the *Virgin and Child with SS. Peter and Paul*, in the National Gallery, which are painted in a more intimate mood. The artist's austerity seems to relax when he deals with this subject.

Hugo van der Goes (*c.* 1430–1482), who was born in Zeeland and settled in Ghent, is perhaps the most original painter of the period. He does not show the outstanding genius of the Van Eycks, Van der Weyden or Bouts, but breaks fresh ground in so far as he emphasises the contrast between realism and mysticism, so characteristic of the School.

His chief work is a great triptych, now in the Uffizzi in Florence, which he painted for Tomaso Portinari, the agent for the Medici in Bruges, the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1476). Mary and the Angels conform to the established tradition, but the types of the shepherds are true to life. Their realism seems to have impressed not only Flemish, but also Italian artists of the period, such as Ghirlandajo and Lorenzo di Credi.

Other works attributed to this master do not reach the same height as the *Adoration.* They are a second *Adoration of the Shepherds* (in Berlin), the *Death of the Virgin* (in Bruges) and a great triptych in a bad state of preservation, *The Trinity* (in Holyrood Palace), painted for James III of Scotland shortly after his marriage with Margaret of Denmark, in 1469, which provides another example of the European reputation of this master whose work has unfortunately suffered gravely from the ravages of time. Hugo van der Goes died insane, in 1482, in a monastery near Brussels.

With Memlinc and Gerard David we are brought back to Bruges. Memlinc † (*c.* 1430–1494) is probably the best-known painter of the School. One of the reasons is that some of his finest works are gathered in Bruges, where they cannot fail to impress the visitor, especially in the picturesque surroundings of the old St. John's Hospital. Another is that his gentle mood makes him easily accessible. A third is that he is the author of a large number of well-preserved paintings which he signed or which can easily be identified.

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† Plates 5 and 6

† Plates 8 and 18

He was probably born in the Rhine country near Mayence, and may have worked in Cologne before settling in Bruges. One of his earliest works is a small triptych belonging to the Duke of Devonshire, painted towards 1468 for Sir John Donne, who no doubt met the master on the occasion of the marriage of Charles the Bold to Margaret of York. In this Chatsworth triptych, representing the Virgin sitting under a canopy between two saints and, on the outside panels, St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist, we already find all the characteristics of charm and poetry and the delicacy of design and colouring which have made Memlinc so popular. The same composition, including the angel-musicians, reappears again and again with a few variations which do not entirely relieve the general impression of monotony, in the large *Marriage of St. Catherine* (Bruges), in the Louvre *Madonna*, in the *Virgin with Donor* (Vienna) and elsewhere. The portraits of the donors and their families kneeling on each side display sometimes a strength of characterisation worthy of Memlinc's great predecessors, but the suavity of saintly and angelic faces shows neither the spirituality of Angelico nor the dignity of Van Eyck and Van der Weyden. A comparison between the latter's *Last Judgment* in Beaune and Memlinc's treatment of the same subject, in Danzig,[1] or between Memlinc's and Roger's *Descent from the Cross*, leads to the same conclusion. The last work (St. John's Hospital), like the *Seven Joys of the Virgin* (Munich), and *The Passion*, (Turin), shows the painter's amazing virtuosity in crowding his pictures with diminutive figures and many episodes, but the *ensemble* remains unconvincing.

An exception should be made, however, for the large triptych in Bruges, representing *St. Christopher between St. Giles and St. Maur* (Bruges Museum), and, more particularly, for the decoration of the casket containing the relics of *St. Ursula* in St. John's Museum. Here Memlinc is at his best, because the small size of the pictures—almost miniatures—do not require the same power as a large unified composition. From all we know, Memlinc was as popular in his time as he is to-day. He received commissions from England, Italy and Spain.

It seems, at first, as if the great School of the 15th century were in danger of falling into decadence or affectation. A faithful disciple of Memlinc would have failed where Memlinc succeeded. There are strict limits to suavity. But Gerard David † (*c.* 1460–1523) was more than a disciple; he was also a master endowed with a great power of characterisation, and if his skill is not so accomplished as that of his predecessor, he succeeds in avoiding the pitfall of preciosity.

Born about 1460, he was received into the Guild of St. Luke in 1484, and died in 1523. Like his contemporary, Quentin Metsys, he belongs to a period of transition between the two centuries, but while Metsys should be considered as the first representative of the Renaissance, David still belongs to the Middle Ages. His name is associated with the economic decadence of Bruges, while Metsys' name is associated with the rise of the great metropolis of Antwerp.

One of David's earliest works is his triptych *Christ Nailed on the Cross*. The central panel is in the National Gallery, the side panels in Antwerp. The figure of Christ still reminds us of Van der Weyden, while we can find in the brutal faces of his tormentors a first trace of the art of caricature, in which the Flemish masters of the 16th century were to find an outlet for their imagination. There is also a greater freedom of dramatic expression in the master's large pictures describing the judgment and torture of Sisamnes, the bad judge, painted for the Bruges Town Hall, than in similar scenes depicted by Bouts for Louvain. The architecture in these historical panels, as in the sacred pictures, is already influenced strongly by the Italian Renaissance. Also in the National Gallery are the *Marriage of St. Catherine* and a *Donor Surrounded by Saints*. The former shows, besides the influence of Memlinc, some qualities which belong particularly to David, the mature type of the saints and a deep religious atmosphere; the latter, part of a destroyed altar-piece, is a good example of the artist's treatment of the landscape, to which he gives increasing importance. Several *Flights into Egypt* showing this characteristic have been ascribed to him.

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[1] This attribution has been questioned.

† Plate 10

During the first years of the 16th century David painted a large *Baptism of Christ* (Bruges), which is perhaps his masterpiece. No work shows better that he remained independent of Memlinc and that he drew his inspiration from earlier masters.

Thus ends the first great period of art in the Low Countries. To be properly understood it should be placed in its setting, against the Gothic town halls of Louvain, Brussels and Bruges, and surrounded with the display of colour and luxury of the Low Countries, at a time when they stood in the forefront of European culture.

Lack of space prevents me from giving even the briefest account of the works of Jacques Daret, Simon Marmion, Albrecht Bouts, Colyn de Coter, Ysenbrant, Prévost, Benson, not to mention many painters known only through one notable work and to whom critics ascribe a number of unidentified pictures similar to it. Some of them, such as the Master of St. Giles, may be compared with the best representatives of the School. We should only obtain an inadequate idea of the artistic wealth and variety of the period if we ignored, besides, many unidentified pictures in the museums of Europe and the United States.

II. RENAISSANCE & POST-RENAISSANCE: RELIGIOUS & MYTHOLOGICAL

At the end of the 15th century, the centre of economic activity, which had hitherto been in the County of Flanders, was transferred to the Duchy of Brabant. Foreign traders, including the Merchant Adventurers, left Bruges to settle in Antwerp. The silting of the Zwyn is usually mentioned as the principal cause of this change, which was due mainly to the policy followed by the Dukes, who favoured the new port, free from mediaeval restrictions and more ready to accept their authority. Mediaeval controlled trade made way to new methods of banking and credit which mark a first step towards modern capitalism.

Art followed trade, and a large number of painters came to Antwerp from all parts of the country. Once more we find among these artists a minority of Walloons beside a majority of Flemings; but from now on the great metropolis became the unrivalled centre of painting. Among these immigrants was Quentin Metsys or Massys † (*c.* 1466–1530), who was very probably born in Louvain about 1466, and settled in Antwerp as a master-painter in 1491.

Among his earlier works are the half-length figures of *Christ* and of the *Virgin Mary*, and perhaps the *Virgin and Child with SS. Catherine and Barbara*, all three in the National Gallery. His first large picture, as far as we know, is the triptych on the *Legend of St. Anne* in Brussels. It already reveals new characteristics both in conception and technique, which contrast with the style of the 15th century. The subjects are treated with great freedom; and the panel showing the death of the saint, blessed by the boy Christ, marks a departure from the accepted tradition.

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† Plates 12 and 27

Metsys' masterpiece is undoubtedly his triptych, the *Descent from the Cross* (1511). It is a transition picture. The central panel suggests the influence of Van der Weyden, while the dramatic scene in which Salome almost brings the Baptist's head to Herod is Shakespearian. Another feature characteristic of the advent of the Renaissance is the caricaturesque facial expressions of the executioners in the martyrdom of the Evangelist. Metsys was the first master of the School to take an interest in distorted and ugly features. He was not the last.

Metsys has sometimes been compared with Leonardo da Vinci. The comparison is somewhat strained from the purely pictorial point of view, but it is not entirely unjustified if the subject-matter be considered. In his mature period the Flemish master used the same type of woman to represent the *Virgin Mary* (in the Berlin Madonna), *St. Magdalen* (Antwerp), or a plain courtesan in a remarkably realistic genre piece. Like Leonardo, he cultivated the ambiguous. In his work the cleavage between good and evil was no longer complete and the influence of humanistic criticism made itself felt. Metsys was no longer merely a "craftsman" like his predecessors; he was a musician, a scholar, a friend of Aegidius,† Thomas More and Erasmus, whom he portrayed side by side. In the fine mansion he occupied in Antwerp, Metsys received the visit of the greatest artists of the period, including Dürer, Lucas de Leyde and Holbein. He died in 1530, when Flemish art was already permeated with the influence of the Italian Renaissance, and when every hope was lost of reconciling the views of the two great opposing parties in the Church.

It is often said that Flemish artists are strongly divided throughout the 16th century between "Italianists" who follow the style of Raphael and Michelangelo, and "Realists" who remain faithful to their national tradition. It is frequently added that the first catered for the tastes of the clergy and the Catholic aristocracy, while the second were in close touch with the people and were patronised by the merchants. We should not accept this generalisation without strong reservations; and we should be particularly careful not to divide the artists of the period into two opposite camps, according to their religious or political convictions. The class division did not coincide with the religious divisions: there is no evidence to show that Brueghel, for instance, whose temperament was so deeply satirical, reflects the views of the Protestants against the Catholics.

What may be said is that the unity of style so noticeable throughout the 15th century broke up in the 16th, and that this change was brought about partly by the rise of Humanism and partly by the growing influence of Italian art in Western Europe. From the beginning of the century the Flemish School produced, on the one hand, artists like Mabuse † (*c.* 1472–*c.* 1535), Van Orley (1493–1542) and Jan Massys ‡ (1509–1575), who combined religious pictures and portraits and were strongly attracted by Italy; and, on the other, painters of popular or homely scenes, such as Aertsen and Pieter Brueghel the Elder § (*c.* 1525–1569), who never appear to have felt any foreign influence, even when, following the fashion of the time, they undertook the Italian journey.

There is no outstanding master among the Italianists. Apart from their obvious imitation of their Southern contemporaries, an imitation which verges on mannerism, they show a tendency to overload their pictures with architectural decoration. They are, most of them, excellent portraitists, especially Mabuse, Frans Floris, Pieter and Frans Pourbus, and Van Cleef, who, together with Antonio Moro, worked in England in the middle of the century. They take great pains in solving technical problems which are new to them and in displaying their skill in complicated perspectives, but they have lost the religious inspiration of their great predecessors, and have not yet absorbed the pagan spirit of their Italian contemporaries. Their important contribution to art is perhaps the large number of cartoons for historical and allegorical tapestries which were worked out in Brussels, Bruges and Antwerp.

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† Plate 27

† Plate 11 ‡ Plate 13 § Plates 20, 21, 32 & 33

Among the Realists, a distinction must be made between a group of talented Antwerp artists—Aertsen † (1508–1575), De Beuckelaer (1530–1573) and other painters of still life and interior scenes—who forestall the fully developed genre pictures of the School of Jordaens—and two great masters, Jerome Bosch and Pieter Brueghel, who follow the style of the Primitives, crowding their composition with a large number of small figures. Bosch was born in Holland in 1460, where he died in 1516, but he exercised a marked influence on his followers in Antwerp. Brueghel and his School owe him, not only some of their outstanding characteristics, but their predilection for folklore and fantastic subjects.

This second group of so-called Realists showed a powerful imagination and introduced in their pictures a sense of satire which illustrates the social and religious conflicts of the period. If their compositions were similar to those of the Primitives, their spirit was very different. They did not paint to edify, but rather to show what might happen if the Gospel story were to be enacted in their own days, among the society in which they lived. Brueghel's *Massacre of the Innocents* becomes, through an obvious anachronism, a raid of the Spanish soldiery on a Flemish village, his *Numbering at Bethlehem* describes a scene outside a tax-collector's office; his *Christ Carrying the Cross* a public execution witnessed by a large crowd, outside a Belgian town. There is no deliberate intention of parody, or even irreverence, but the opposition between the spirit of the Gospel and the spirit of the World is strongly emphasised. This is one of the reasons which has considerably increased Brueghel's popularity during the last fifty years; but it is not the only one. He is perhaps the only master of the Flemish School of the 16th century whose rich colouring may be compared with that of the Primitives, on the one hand, and the masters of the Rubens period on the other. In Flanders, the quality of colour is the surest test of genius.

Pieter Brueghel the Elder is undoubtedly the most original master of the 16th century, and his influence on later developments, both in landscape and genre, cannot be denied. He has been hailed as the founder of a School. This statement must be qualified. He does not stand out in the 16th century as the Van Eycks stand out in the 15th or Rubens in the 17th. Some of his followers, like his son Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564–*c.* 1637), either copied his pictures with remarkable success or provided some valuable work " in the manner " of the master; but a large number, like his eldest son Jan † (1568–1625) (or Velvet Brueghel, owing to the softness of his tone colour), abandoned the archaic style of the old School and joined the new Antwerp School which flourished in the 17th century in the Rubens studio.

Brueghel lived in a divided world, and could only preserve the national tradition at the cost of disunion. He never attempted to reconcile the two opposite tendencies which severed Realists from Italianists, native artists from followers of foreign fashions, genuine observers of contemporary life and faithful servants of convention. We must wait until the end of the Civil War in the Low Countries and the separation of the Southern from the Northern provinces, before witnessing this extraordinary reunion of the scattered forces of art under one leadership.

Peter Paul Rubens ‡ (1577–1640) did more than represent the revival of Flemish religious

† Plate 31

† Plate 34 ‡ Colour Plate 3, Plates 15, 16, 22, 23, 29 and 35

art under the powerful impulse of the Counter-Reformation, the complete assimilation of the Italian Renaissance in great decorative canvases painted for churches and palaces. He also stood for a closer contact with the people and the land, a new and powerful expression of the national spirit. The Rubens studio not only catered for the Church and the aristocracy, it produced a large number of still-life, portraits, landscapes and genre scenes which decorated the wealthy houses of the local bourgeoisie. A number of specialists co-operated with the master. Young Van Dyck helped him with the figures, Jan Brueghel and Wildens (*c.* 1586–1653) with his landscapes, Snyders (1579–1657) with still-life and hunting scenes, and although Jordaens † (1593–1678) stood somewhat aloof, he came in frequent contact with the master and brought into the School a robust realism inherited from Brueghel.

The same technique and brushwork, the same sense of colour, the same sense of balance in composition, linked together the members of the Rubens studio. They applied these gifts to subjects ranging from the broad humour of family festivities to the most dramatic aspects of the Passion.

History, allegory, religion, landscape, portrait, genre, were the means through which this new artistic spirit manifested itself. Everything could be transformed and glorified through the prism of Beauty, even the life of Marie de Medici ‡ or the reign of James I. Everything was grist to the mill of the Antwerp workshop, which was pressed for more and more urgent commissions coming from Spain, France, Italy, England and Germany. Its intensive production can only be compared with that of the studios of the greatest Florentine and Venetian masters of the 16th century. There is, however, a notable difference. Rubens did not limit his activity to "noble" subjects, dealing with the Christian religion or with pagan myths. Like Shakespeare, he did not scorn "vulgarity." In spite of the fact that he generally left his collaborators to deal with still-life and genre scenes, he directed and inspired their work; and, in the *Kermesse* † (Louvre), he showed that he might have excelled in these less august subjects as he excelled in the others.

The rise of the Rubens School is one of the most surprising events in the history of art. When he began to work in Antwerp after his return from Italy, in 1610, Flemish Italianism had lost most of its vigour and Realism was only cultivated by second-rate masters in search of the picturesque. The Flemish School was on the verge of decadence, and it seemed as if the artistic life of the Low Countries were henceforth to pass to Holland, where Frans Hals had begun to paint and where the great figure of Rembrandt was soon to appear. The genius of Rubens broke all the rules of a narrow determinism. He came at a time when his country suffered from the consequences of civil war, when his Church had been weakened by a long and cruel struggle, in a great metropolis which had lost its trade and which was indefinitely cut off from the sea. He snatched a great artistic victory from this material defeat and gave a new lease of life to Flemish painting, bringing it once more to the first rank among European Schools.

It would be vain to try and explain away this "miracle" by a spontaneous development of the Antwerp School. None of Rubens' immediate predecessors, such as Martin de Vos (1532–1603) or Ambroise Francken (1544–1618) or his master, Otto Venius (1558–1629), show any of the qualities which might be expected from precursors. They stand at the end of a period, not at the beginning. Rubens learnt more during the eight years he spent in Italy than during his apprenticeship in Antwerp. His true masters were Michelangelo, Titian and Raphael. His copies and sketches show the true humility with which he approached their work. But his admiration did not prevent him from keeping his eyes open and observing the people and the land which surrounded him after his return home. He was not only the faithful pupil of the great masters of the Italian Renaissance, he remained to the last years of his long and active life the faithful pupil of Nature and Man. And he had the faculty of putting down on the canvas what he had seen with unsurpassed quickness and dexterity. That is the secret of his genius. It is also the reason why many critics, trained in classical art, have some difficulty in appreciating his works as they should be appreciated.

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† Plate 14 ‡ Plate 16

† Plate 35

There was a time, particularly in the 19th century, when the touch of vulgarity which true realism implies offended the connoisseur. People confused "good manners" with "good taste" and denied that coarseness could be compatible with artistic expression. We have lost these prejudices, and are fortunately able to appreciate the rough humour of Brueghel or Brouwer, but we are still unable to reconcile the "grand style" with a bold statement of fact. We believe that realism should be relegated to the kitchen of the palace of art and not intrude in the drawing-room; it suits the cook and the gardener, but it does not suit the master of the house or his principal guests. We do not object to Jordaens' nude women because they generally represent peasants or rural nymphs, but we cannot adapt our eye and feelings to the vision of proud goddesses built on the same scale. Michelangelo's *Night* does not offend us, because we can discover in her some features of the Venus of Milo, but Rubens' Venus offends many people because they cannot rid themselves of the notion that an artist should not take every opportunity of painting a nude study of his wife. We know from the correspondence of the time that Venus, in the *Judgment of Paris,*† was, in fact, the artist's wife, Hélène Fourment. This revelation appeased the conscientious scruples of Philip IV of Spain who had ordered the picture. But our difficulties are not moral but artistic, and they are consequently more persistent.

Rubens' art is as far remote from mysticism as from classicism. It is, at the same time, very much concerned with the Church and deeply rooted in the tradition of the Italian Renaissance. If we compare his religious pictures with those of the Van Eyck School, we cannot fail to notice that they merely interpret the Gospel story in human terms without attempting to idealise this plain humanity through particularly dignified or graceful attitudes. This is precisely what the great Italian masters had done, without succeeding, however, in recapturing the earnest devotion and spiritual atmosphere of Giotto and Fra Angelico. Those who have lived for a long time among the works of the mediaevalists, whether Italian or Flemish, realise that the Madonnas and saints of Raphael and Titian are scarcely less human than those of Rubens. They may look more noble and graceful, but no amount of gracefulness and dignity can bridge the gap between the human and the spiritual.

Whatever the defects of Rubens' religious works, they show a great honesty. Confronted with a subject which baffled his power, in a period when the great mediaeval tradition had been lost, he did his best to interpret God through His creation and looked at this creation as a true Fleming looking at the men, women and trees of Flanders. Behind the scholar, the humanist and the diplomatist, behind the collector of antique marbles and Italian paintings, stood a powerful craftsman who had not lost touch with the abundant life of his people.

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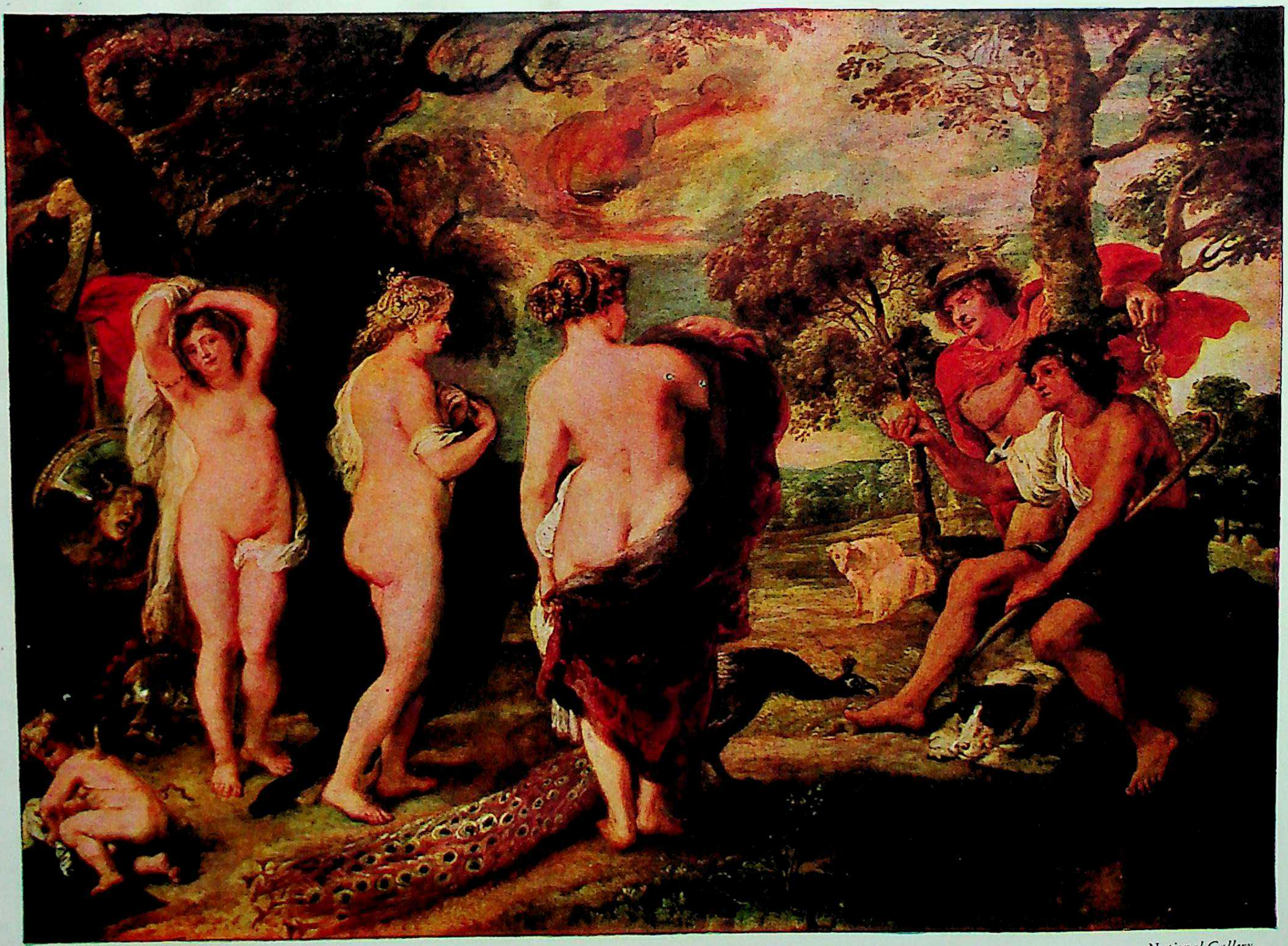
† Colour Plate 3



National Gallery

Plate 3

THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS *By Peter Paul Rubens* (1577-1640)

Original 57" × 75"

III. LANDSCAPE

THE landscape occupies a dominant position in the Flemish School of art. It is quite as important as the portrait and, like the portrait, originates from the miniatures of the late 14th and early 15th centuries. Some of these miniatures, like the "Series of the Months" in the Book of Hours preserved at Chantilly, and attributed to the "brothers of Limburg," are, in fact, already true landscapes, an illustrated calendar. Even when the subject is religious, a great deal of space is given to the nature-background; the artists, in order to "fill in their page," either use a high perspective or raise the line of the horizon through other means, such as the introduction of cliffs and rocks.

When we compare the nature-background of these miniatures with that of the great pictures by the Van Eycks, including the *Adoration of the Lamb*,† we cannot fail to notice that the only essential change is that brought about by the use of another medium. The trees and plants are not mere indications used to place the story in its setting; they are painted with the greatest care and can easily be identified. So are and can the birds and flowers in most of the paintings of the period. Through the open windows of some of Campin's and Memlinc's pictures we see familiar scenes of town or country life: citizens walking to and fro in the streets, masons engaged in building a house, a donkey loaded with sacks of corn led to the mill, peasants sowing or reaping. These incidents play an important part in the general atmosphere prevailing in these works and differentiate them from early Italian religious paintings in which the whole scene is translated in spiritual terms. The Flemish Primitives possess the power of painting the Holy Virgin and the saints, but they delight in reminding us that we belong to this world and that Christian worship does not stop the natural course of everyday life.

On the whole, these background landscapes are therefore realistic and belong to Flanders. The Flemish 15th century painters agree with their Italian contemporaries in ignoring historical and geographical accuracy and in setting their religious scenes in the landscape of their own land and the costumes or architecture of their own period. In some instances the landscape is reminiscent of the Meuse or the Rhine valley; in others, high cliffs and rocks make their appearance which do not belong to the Low Countries or indeed to any country. These apparent flights of fancy are perhaps due to the method used by the early miniaturists to "fill in their page," which has been mentioned above.

Towards the end of the century, particularly with Gerard David and Jerome Bosch, we notice that certain subjects, like the *Flight into Egypt* † and *St. Jerome in the Desert*,‡ were given more prominence, owing no doubt to the fact that they lent themselves particularly well to landscape development. During the first years of the 16th century two Walloon painters broke fresh ground in the same direction. Both Patinir (1485–1524) and Henri Bles (*c.* 1480–*c.* 1550) were born in the Meuse valley and interpreted more or less freely their picturesque native country. With them the Biblical incident became a mere pretext; sometimes the characters to whom they refer can scarcely be discovered under the shadow of a tree or in front of a cave.

It is significant that, when Dürer referred to his visit to Antwerp in 1521, he mentioned Patinir as a "landscape painter"—a very unusual expression at the time. What happened during these years was that the scenery, which had been kept in the background during the previous period in order to give due prominence to the subject painted for the edification of the faithful, now invaded the foreground and absorbed all the picture. A similar effect is produced in a film when the back picture is rapidly brought forward while the scene enacted in the foreground fades out.

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† Plate 9

† Plate 10 ‡ Plate 19

We may say that, from 1520, pure landscape came within its own right. It was no longer the setting of the main subject: it had become itself the main subject.

In landscape, as in genre, the great initiator was Brueghel. It is often forgotten that this master was first known as an engraver, and that most of his oil-painting, which represents only a fraction of his work, was done during the last period of his life (1558–1569). The landscapes seem to have been painted after he had left Antwerp to settle in Brussels, and were based on Brabant scenery in which picturesque rocks and mountains were sometimes introduced. Some of these were themselves founded on sketches made by Brueghel during his Italian journey. He followed the Rhine, crossed the Alps, and travelled as far as Naples. Reminiscences of the impressions collected during these travels can be found here and there, successfully combined with his Belgian landscapes. Brueghel painted only what he had seen, and did not let imagination carry him too far, as it did Patinir or Bles. He remained at heart a realist, but a realist who did not hesitate to use for his purpose all the material which he had collected.

Five out of his six large landscapes still in existence belong to a series illustrating the months of the year. We find there fully developed the pictorial ideas which inspired, over a century before, the authors of the illustrated calendar contained in the *Book of Hours* of the Duc de Berry. Winter and snow contrast with summer and rich crops, and throughout the series the importance of man's work in the countryside is duly emphasised. There are also entirely new features, the wind and the rain, the clouds throwing their shadows over the valleys, a new feeling for distance, and a keen perception of the sea.

It would be a mistake to limit our attention to the landscapes belonging to the series of the months, such as *Hunters in the Snow* and the *Return of the Herd* (both in Vienna). One of the finest examples of the master's work is the *Magpie on the Gibbet* † which illustrates a proverb, and the *Fall of Icarus*,‡ in which the mythological incident serves as a pretext for a glowing sunset on the sea. Another picture generally known as a *Storm at Sea* describes in the same way the story of Jonah and the Whale.

With Brueghel, we find the landscape in full evolution passing from the Biblical and mythological subject to the description of land and sea, and from the imaginative conception of early 16th century artists to the sober interpretation of nature given us by modern painters.

The final development of landscape painting was brought about by Rubens in the last years of his life, when he spent most of his time in his country residence of the Steen, close to Malines (1635–1640). This aspect of Rubens' genius has been brought to the fore only in recent years. Formerly the master was known mostly for his great religious and allegorical pictures decorating the Luxembourg, Whitehall, or the churches which the Jesuits were building at the time in Belgium and Southern Germany. He was also appreciated for his portraits, hunting scenes and mythological paintings, which were commissioned by the wealthy nobles and bourgeois to be hung in their castles and mansions. Landscapes at the time were not yet popular, and it is no doubt one of the reasons why the master (who was constantly asked to fulfil more commissions than he could cope with) did not find the leisure to devote himself to what must necessarily have been at first a labour of love.

At the beginning of his career, when he used a landscape setting for his subjects, he

† Plate 20 ‡ Plate 21

frequently entrusted the task to one of his collaborators, such as Jan Brueghel or Wildens, who had acquired a reputation in that special branch of painting. There are, of course, exceptions, such as the well-known *Farm at Laeken*, but critics seem to agree that, before 1635, Rubens had not been able to give a full expression of what the landscape meant to him. He apparently painted a number of mythological pictures, hunting and genre scenes without the help of his collaborators, but even when these pictures are " by his own hand " they are still set in a romantic atmosphere very different from the conscientious and painstaking mood so remarkable in the later period.

Towards the end of his life the indefatigable master of the Rubens studio, the great traveller, scholar and collector, the political adviser and diplomat, was at last compelled to take some rest. He suffered acutely from gout and was ordered by his doctor to leave Antwerp for several months every year. In the comparative solitude of the Steen he could not resist the appeal which the country made to him through its forms and colour, its wide perspective and changing moods. He created there thirty to forty large pictures in which he recorded faithfully what he had seen and felt. The result is the greatest collection of landscapes the world has ever known. The master was at last free to follow his own inspiration without being restricted by the demands made upon him.

A large proportion of these canvases remained unsold until his death. They were little known to the landscape painters of the 18th century, who sought their inspiration mostly in the works of Claude Lorrain and Poussin, or to a lesser extent in those of Hobbema or Ruysdael. While the reputation of Rubens increased in other respects, this important aspect of his activity was overshadowed by the prevalent taste for the classical compositions of Claude.

It was not until the end of the 18th century that reference was again made to the landscapes of Rubens. The first important one is included in a letter from Gainsborough to David Garrick, dated 1768, in which the painter advises the actor to call on the Duke and Duchess of Montagu to see the portraits he had painted of them, adding: " This will provide you an opportunity to admire the landscape by Rubens." This picture has been identified as the *Watering Place*. It is significant that a few years later Gainsborough modified his style of landscape and scored a remarkable success with his own *Watering Place*, which Horace Walpole proclaimed as being " in the style of Rubens," which it certainly was.

The difficulty which students and young artists had in studying the works of the great masters in those days must be taken into account. The National Gallery in London was not founded until 1824, and apart from the public sales, there were few opportunities for those not moving in aristocratic circles to acquaint themselves with the masterpieces of European art. Such an opportunity was nevertheless given them in 1815, at a special exhibition organised by the British Institution, when the Rubens' *Castle of Steen* provoked a great stir.

From the beginning of the century there had been an intense art trade between Italy and England. Threatened with French exactions, a number of Italian collectors sold their pictures to English agents who smuggled them through the French blockade. We know that two large landscapes (4½ feet by 8) reached this country, in 1805, from the Palazzo Balbi in Genoa. They were two companion pictures by Rubens, Autumn and Summer: the *Castle of Steen* † (National Gallery) and the *Rainbow* ‡ (Wallace Collection). Constable, in one of his letters, deplores that they were ever separated, for they complete each other. We may express the same regret to-day, with the hope that the sad mistake may soon be repaired.

We also know that Sir George Beaumont, the friend and patron of Constable, purchased

† Plate 22 ‡ Plate 23

the *Castle of Steen*, and that the painter may have had the opportunity of studying it before the 1815 exhibition. As in the case of Gainsborough, it took a few years before the influence of this discovery, of Rubens as a master of landscape, made itself felt upon him. The comparison between Constable's works before and after 1815 is conclusive. Before that date he produced smaller landscapes, too original and too realistic not to provoke criticism at a time when care for detail and smoothness were the fashion, but which did not reveal his outstanding genius. *Flatford Mill* (1817) heralds a change, and the *Haywain* (1821) shows a complete transformation. A comparison between this masterpiece and the *Castle of Steen*, which can be made without difficulty in the National Gallery, will show that the two great pictures are of similar sizes, that their composition and atmosphere are closely connected and that even the brushwork and the use of *impasto* bring them closer together. Constable developed a new technique, often using the knife in order further to increase its vividness—as in *Hadleigh Castle* (1829), a relatively recent acquisition of the National Gallery.

The *Haywain* was shown in Paris in 1824, and strongly impressed both Delacroix and Rousseau. Thus the tradition of modern landscape painting founded by Rubens was handed down, through Constable, to the French painters of the 19th century.

Although in his painting Constable was more and more attracted in the direction of realistic landscape, he remained loyal, in his writings, to his old admiration for Claude. The latter was to the last "inimitable," but the homage paid to the Flemish master, in a lecture delivered in 1833, is characteristic: "In no other branch of art is Rubens greater than in landscape, the freshness and dewy light, the joyous and animated character which he has imparted to it. . . . Rubens delighted in phenomena—rainbows upon a stormy sky, bursts of sunshine, moonlight, meteors and impetuous torrents mingling their sound with wind and wave." In a later lecture, delivered at the Royal Institution in 1836, Constable referred once more to these qualities which he must have been conscious of having achieved himself: "By the rainbow I do not allude to a particular picture, for Rubens often introduced it. I mean indeed more than the rainbow itself, I mean dewy light and freshness, the parting shower with the exhilaration of the returning sun, effects which Rubens more than any other painter has perfected on canvas."

IV. THE PORTRAIT

THE contribution of the Flemish School to portraiture is as remarkable as its contribution to landscape painting. Just as the origin of landscape must be sought in the background of religious pictures, the origin of portrait is connected with their foreground. A number of altar-pieces of the 15th century represent the Virgin and Child enthroned, attended by saints and surrounded with angels. Through a window or an interval between two columns the countryside may be seen, while beside the throne kneels the donor, sometimes accompanied by his family. Both landscape and portrait are subordinated to the main subject. Such pictures, given to a church and often placed on the altar of a side chapel, were considered as family memorials, and the donor wished to appear on the scene. Whether the work was commissioned by a nobleman, a prince of the

Church or a rich merchant, his features must be duly recorded. But in Flanders he remains in the attitude of prayer, and therefore his portrait does not disturb the general atmosphere. He completes the scheme of adoration. It would never have occurred to a Flemish painter to allow his patron to play an active part in the religious drama; to figure, for instance, as one of the three kings in the *Adoration*, or one of their attendants. This was sometimes done by Italian artists of the same period, such as Botticelli and Ghirlandajo, and this indicates a characteristic difference between the Schools.

There are a few portraits of donors in the early manuscripts, such as that of Jean, Duc de Berry, in the *Book of Hours*. They are generally painted in profile, with great delicacy but without much relief. As early as 1436, however, in his *Virgin and Child* (Bruges), Jan van Eyck created a type of portrait which has never been surpassed. His *Canon Van der Paele* is a portrait, in the sense that it gives us a deep insight into the character of the old priest, but it is the portrait of a donor, in the sense that worship remains the dominant impression.

This balance between the realistic analysis of the personality of the sitter and the mood expressed by his attitude may be found in other Eyckian donors, such as Josse Fyt and his wife (outside panel of the *Adoration of the Lamb*) and Chancellor Rolin (*Virgin and Child*, Louvre). With other painters of the School, the donor seems to stand aloof from the scene and to be almost indifferent to it, but with Van Eyck we can always discover a subtle contrast between the expression of the sitter when taking part in a religious scene or when painted apart from it. Compare for instance the pictures mentioned above with Van Eyck's *Man in a Turban* † (National Gallery), *Cardinal Albergati* ‡ or the famous portrait of the master's wife § (Bruges).

The same contrast may be noticed between Memlinc's *Martin van Nieuwenhove* * (St. John's Hospital, Bruges) and most of his isolated portraits. This work belongs to a small-sized diptych which the nobles of the period carried with them on their travels or their military expeditions. They were set open on the table that served as their private altar. Several of these donors have been separated in the course of centuries from the image they worshipped. In such a diptych by Van der Weyden, shown at Burlington House in 1927, the *Madonna* came from the United States (Huntington Collection) and *Philippe de Croy* from the Antwerp Museum.

The early painters of the School favour small portraits, head and shoulders, against a uniform dark background giving great relief to the face. They use the hands with great effect. The only full-length portrait is the well-known *Arnolfini and his Wife* (National Gallery). But modern criticism has shown that this is really a picture commemorating a private marriage ceremony witnessed by Van Eyck as a friend. Hence the inscription "*Johannes de Eyck fuit hic.*"

It has already been pointed out that the main work of the 16th century Italianists was portraiture.

Quentin Metsys remained generally faithful to the composition favoured by Memlinc, but he developed relief, and in some instances, as in his portrait of *Aegidius*,† slightly departed from the conventional attitude. The same remark applies to Mabuse. Towards the middle of the century the influence of Raphael and Titian made itself felt; and both Josse van Cleef (*c.* 1491–1540) and Antonio Moro ‡ (*c.* 1519–1576) instilled new life into their work and accentuated the facial expression of their sitters. Moro also increased the size of his portraits, bringing them to three-quarters length. He even painted a full-length, which heralded the grand manner of the following century.

Both Van Cleef and Moro came to England, where they left valuable work. They did not, however, settle in England. François Pourbus (the second of that name—1569–

† Frontispiece ‡ Plate 24 § Plate 25 * Plate 8

† Plate 27 ‡ Plate 28

1622) met with equal success in Italy and later in France, where he became Court painter to Marie de Medici. A few second-rate Flemish artists, such as Marc Gheeraerts, emigrated to England after the revolution of 1566 against Spain, and achieved success at Court. Their portraits, painted in an archaic style, are very different from those of their Flemish contemporaries who remained in Antwerp, and seem to have been influenced by the art of the great English miniaturists Hilliard and Oliver. It should not be forgotten that English taste was not strongly affected by the Renaissance before the beginning of the next century, when Lord Arundel and later the Duke of Buckingham began their collections of antique marbles. Rubens painted his great portrait of Lady Arundel in 1620.

By that time the Rubens studio was in full activity in Antwerp, and Flemish portraiture had undergone further developments. Its debt to Italy, especially to Titian, must be fully acknowledged, but we can scarcely speak of influence when dealing with an art which had reached such a climax of perfection.

With Rubens and Van Dyck, Northern European portraiture acquired an incomparable vividness of expression and freedom of composition. It would be pedantic to seek for similarity in the attitudes of the sitters, although such similarity no doubt exists, since the art of the 17th century in Flanders is based on that of the 16th century in Italy; but the spirit in which Flemish composition was carried out is as original as that of Velazquez, Frans Hals or Rembrandt. The old formulas seem almost exhausted, but the ideas are both new and startling.

Neither should we, in this short sketch, devote much space to comparison between the portraits of Rubens and those of Van Dyck and Jordaens. The works of the latter are marked by a kind of jovial and expansive robustness; while it is customary to say that Van Dyck is less virile than Rubens. The latter generalisation is misleading, for Van Dyck† (1599–1641) was the most versatile artist not only of the Flemish School, but of any School. It is scarcely believable that the same master should have created the realistic *Van der Geest*, in the National Gallery, and the delicate *Marchesa Cattaneo*, in the same collection; the ultra-refined *Abbé Scaglia* and the forbidding *Archduchess Isabella Dressed as a Nun*. These contrasts can sometimes be explained by the personality of the sitter, but more frequently by the period and the country in which the work was painted.

Apart from a few pictures dating from an early period when Rubens, who was by no means a precocious artist, had not yet discovered his true originality, it is not easy to date a portrait by him. He painted in Spain and in France very much as he painted in Antwerp, and the few works he left in England after his short visit (1629–1630), such as *The Gerbier Family*, do not look particularly English. Van Dyck was far more sensitive to his surroundings, and this is perhaps why he was such a supremely good portraitist. Strength of personality is the mark of true artistic genius, but a too strong personality is sometimes less likely to be affected by outside influence, including the influence of the personality which should be recorded on the canvas.

There is only one Rubens; there are at least three Van Dycks. Van Dyck in Flanders, working in the Antwerp studio before his first visit to England (1621); Van Dyck in Italy (1623–1629); Van Dyck during his final visit to England (1632–1641). We might even add a fourth period, including the months spent in the Low Countries after the artist's return from Italy. The first manner is characterised by the direct realism of the Antwerp citizen *Cornelius van der Geest*; the second by the somewhat austere mood of the Genoese aristocracy, as in the *Marchesa Cattaneo*; and the third by the irresponsible elegance of the Court of Charles I—see *The Villiers Brothers* (National Gallery). These changes are reflected by the colouring and the technique used by the artist. First, we notice a bold brushwork with lavish use of *impasto*, later, a more restrained brushwork and darker colouring—deep browns and greens—and lastly a smooth brushwork, in light colours—light greys and blues. The changes seem to have been almost unintentional, but they are nevertheless startling. It would be difficult to discover elsewhere such striking and sudden transformations of style following a change of environment.

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† Colour Plate 4, Plates 17, 30 and 36

The first time Van Dyck came to England, in 1621, he did not make a deep impression. Daniel Mytens, a Dutchman who had passed through the Antwerp studio, was at the time the favourite Court painter of King James I; and as far as we know, apart from several portraits of his patron Lord Arundel, the only important commission Van Dyck then received were copies from portraits of members of the royal family by Van Somer, a second-rate artist who had been Mytens' predecessor. It is also possible that the young Antwerp master found himself unable to acclimatise himself to this country's airs and graces, as he did supremely well a few years later. The change from Antwerp to London was too sudden. The painter's early style, when he out-Rubensed Rubens, was far too abrupt and violent not to provoke some unfavourable reaction.

Certain things happened between 1621 and 1632. Charles I succeeded King James in 1625, Rubens paid a prolonged diplomatic visit to England in 1629, and Van Dyck spent eight years in Italy, mostly in Genoa.

Charles and Buckingham were both connoisseurs. As Prince of Wales, Charles had already shown a great interest in the Antwerp studio, and Rubens had sent him his well-known self-portrait in token of gratitude. This paved the way for the confidential mission of 1629, when Rubens was sent to London by Philip IV of Spain, in order to restore friendly relations and to prevent, if possible, another outbreak of war, from which Belgium would be the first to suffer.

The correspondence of the time seems to show that King Charles took far more interest in Rubens as a person and an artist than in his statesmanship. The delays which obliged the master to postpone his departure for so long were partly caused by the arrogance of the Spanish Junta, but also by the dilatoriness of the King's ministers, who did not wish to reach decisions without their Sovereign's previous approval, while the latter preferred to talk art with his guest and to ask his advice on prospective purchases for his collection. The only important work left by Rubens in England was the propaganda picture called *War and Peace*, in the National Gallery, which was his parting gift to the King. The latter gave him a commission for the decoration of the Banqueting House, Whitehall (completed several years later), and conferred a knighthood upon him; but the diplomatic mission, although successful at the time, did not bear fruit for long.

Van Dyck was acquainted through Rubens with the works of Raphael and Titian, but his stay in Italy increased his admiration for them, as can be shown by the well-known sketch-book preserved at Chatsworth. Titian should specially be taken into account if we wish to explain the difference between the Antwerp and the Genoese portraits of Van Dyck; and the Genoese portraits must be kept in mind when we examine the new style which he adopted when he settled in England.

If the colouring of the Italian and English portraits is different, their composition is very similar. It was in Italy that Van Dyck learned and practised the art of painting large family groups, children groups, double half-length portraits, full-length portraits of men and women, the foot raised on the first step of a monumental staircase, or leaning on the pedestal of a column draped in heavy curtains. And it was from Italy that he brought these somewhat conventional designs to England.

These conventions have frequently been attacked by modern critics, who accuse the

Antwerp master of having exerted a cramping influence on the development of English painting. It is true that, apart from Dobson, who might have become one of the greatest masters of English art, the immediate successors of Van Dyck—such as Lely and Kneller—do not carry the tradition much farther. They follow the Van Dyck style, but since they do not possess the master's genius, the conventions become all too apparent.

We want a genius to meet a genius, as Van Dyck met Titian in Italy, as Gainsborough met Van Dyck at Wilton House when he visited its gallery of portraits, shortly after settling in Bath. It was more than a century after Van Dyck's death before his work bore fruit on English soil. Just as the discovery of Rubens' *Castle of Steen* by Constable gave rise to the modern School of landscape-painting, the discovery of Van Dyck's work by Gainsborough opened a new era in portrait-painting in the "grand manner." Before 1760, Gainsborough had painted a number of small portraits in a landscape, or merely head and shoulder. As a contemporary puts it: "He required to be coaxed along the road to greatness, and the chief coaxer at the time was Van Dyck, whom he repaid with a gratitude which lasted all his life" (Armstrong). He painted copies of Van Dyck's works which were so good that, according to Reynolds, "they could not be distinguished from the originals." The statement may still be verified in the case of Van Dyck's well-known *George and Francis Villiers* (*see page* 22).

This conjunction of the greatest English masters of the 18th century with the greatest Flemish masters of the 17th has not yet been sufficiently emphasised. It shows, better than anything else, that there is a continuity in artistic inspiration which ignores political frontiers and a fraternity of genius which challenges the lapse of time.

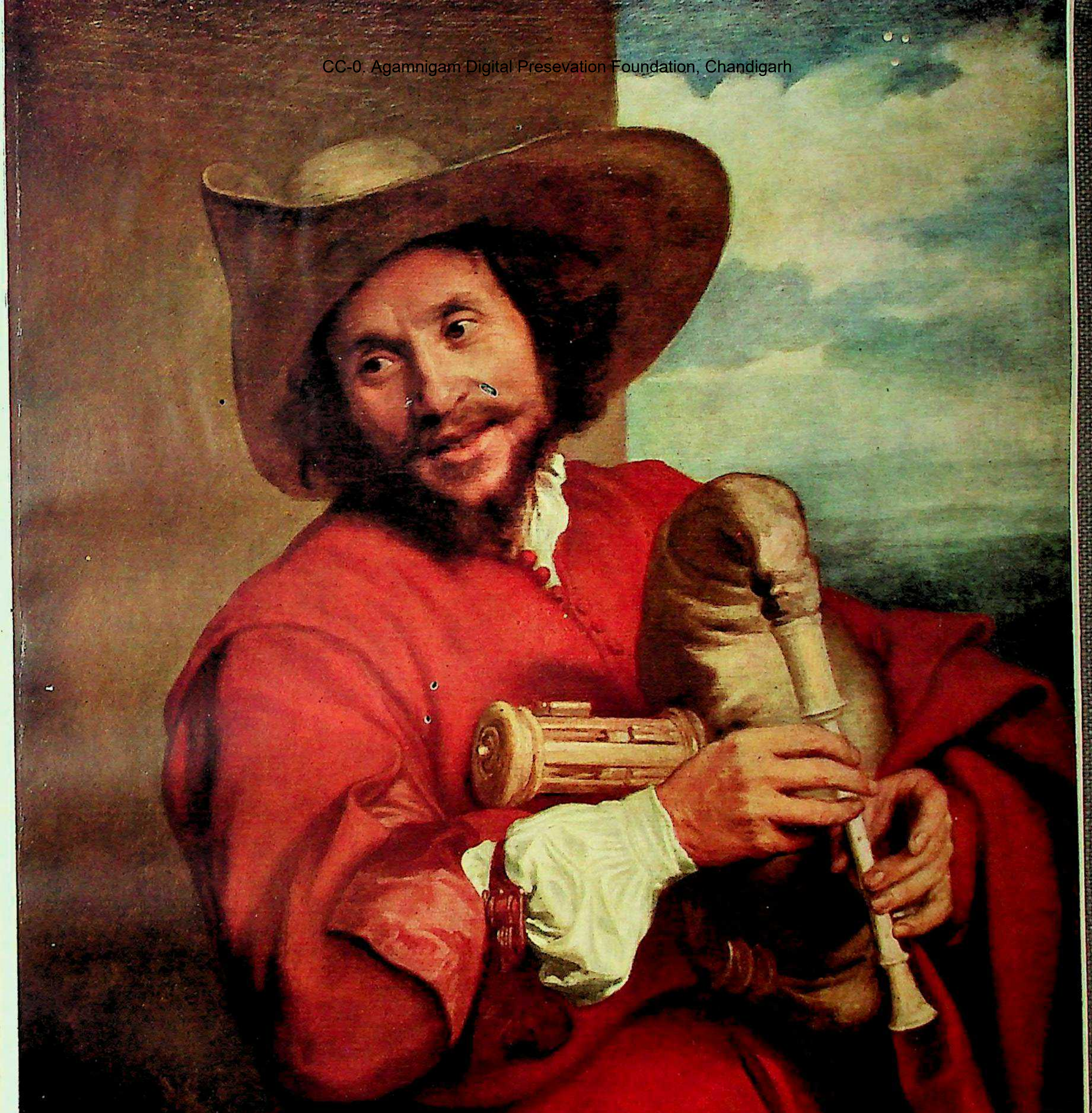
Besides Rubens, Van Dyck and Jordaens there are several first-rate portrait painters in the 17th century who follow the same tradition, foremost among them Sustermans, who settled in Italy, where he died in 1681, and Cornelis de Vos (1585–1651), who specialised in portraiture in the Rubens studio.

V. GENRE

"GENRE" is a somewhat loose expression used by critics when they refer to all subjects which cannot be classified under any other name. But in Flemish art it is far from meaningless. It is the expression of the life of the people, the peasants in the fields, the townspeople in the streets and their homes, hard at work or spending their leisure in the inns or in public festivities. They may be considered as collective portraits, and are, for that reason, of particular historical and artistic interest.

Once more we must go back to the early miniatures and the background of 15th century religious pictures to trace the origin of these works. The earliest genre paintings can be found in the "calendars" illustrating the *Books of Hours*. There we find already the husbandman ploughing his field, felling trees or leading his donkey to the mill, and the aristocracy engaged in hunting or love-making.

Similar scenes of everyday life are seen in the background of a large number of altarpieces and portraits of the same period. Whenever we catch sight of a fragment of landscape through a window or between the columns of a church, we discover diminutive figures of men and women, noble or villein, pursuing their customary occupation. It would be wrong to call the Virgins and saints



Viscount Cowdray

Plate 4

FRANÇOIS LANGLOIS *By Anthony van Dyck* (1599-1641)

Original 41″ × 32″

of Van Eyck, Bouts or Memlinc realistic, but the background before which these spiritual visions appear undoubtedly contains realistic episodes. It is precisely this combination of mysticism and realism which is characteristic of Flemish religious art, compared with Italian art. The Gospel story is pictured as happening in 15th century Flanders, among 15th century Flemish people. There is not the faintest attempt to introduce into it touches of local colour suggesting Eastern surroundings. Geography and chronology are both ignored, but other-worldly reality is brought into close contact with worldly reality.

We might suggest that the popular scenes described by Brueghel and his successors emerged directly from the background of sacred pictures, as did the landscape in the first years of the 16th century. This elimination or subordination of religious subjects occurred, indeed, at a later date, but the first development of the "human comedy" had already taken place in a very different manner and a different setting. The fact that genre subjects were treated first independently from the landscape and on a much larger scale may be due to the influence of Quentin Metsys (*c.* 1466–1530), the first great master of the Antwerp School.

The complex character of Metsys' genius has already been pointed out. He belongs to the later Middle Ages through his religious pictures, which still reflect the fervour and earnestness of the "Primitives"; but towards the end of his life he was steeped in the humanism of the Renaissance. His *Banker and his Wife* (Louvre) is an interior scene rather than a portrait, while his well-known *Courtesan and the Old Man* is broad satire verging on caricature.

In these works Metsys introduced a new scheme of composition which was adopted by a number of minor artists of the next generation. The figures—half length—are brought close to the onlooker and are almost life-size. The *Usurers* by Van Reymerswaele (1497–*c.* 1560), in the National Gallery, is a good example of the way Metsys' double portrait was transformed into a satiric genre-painting. To the same group of the Antwerp School belong Van Hemessen (1504–1555), De Beuckelaer (1530–1573) and Pieter Aertsen † (1508–1575). The two first tried vainly to reconcile the new style with the old tradition, and chose Biblical subjects such as the *Prodigal Son*, the *Calling of St. Matthew* or *Jesus in the House of Martha*, which lent themselves to interior scenes or still life. But Aertsen, whose works can be seen in Antwerp, may be considered as the forerunner of Jordaens and of the genre painters of the next century, in his realistic descriptions of home life, centred in the kitchen.

Meanwhile, genre developed on quite different lines under the influence of Pieter Brueghel. In his works we witness the same subordination of religious subjects to their realistic surroundings which we witnessed in following the evolution of the landscape. The background of the 15th century altarpiece absorbed more and more of the artist's attention until the foreground gradually disappeared. This is particularly noticeable in the treatment of the *Numbering at Bethlehem* (Brussels) or of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, in which the main characters are scarcely distinguishable from the crowd surrounding them. But Brueghel's method is very different from that of Metsys' successors. Instead of breaking the tradition, he altered it to suit his purpose, crowding his pictures with small figures engaged in different occupations, and painted with the same care for detail which characterises the "Primitives." Considered from this angle, his style is archaic, but considered from the master's conception of the society in which he moved, it is more modern than that of the full Renaissance, or of Romanticism.

This is no doubt the reason for the popularity which Brueghel's works have achieved recently. There is an intellectual connection between the Flemish realism of the 16th century and the realism of the 20th century, a connection which affects many modern painters, particularly in Belgium, and which is reflected in their works.

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† Plate 31

Since the most important pictures of Brueghel, both in genre and landscape, were painted during the last years of his life (1560–1569), critics have tried to explain this remarkable revival of "Primitivism" and to fill the gap existing between the last masters of the 15th century and the great master of the 16th. As far as landscape is concerned, and the treatment of allegorical scenes descriptive of hell and its "devilries," Brueghel was evidently influenced by his forerunner Jerome Bosch (1460–1516), but while Bosch's works retain a fantastic character, Brueghel's are more frequently connected with his social surroundings. Many of his engravings are purely imaginative; but out of thirty-six pictures which can be safely attributed to him, three only—*The Fall of the Angels*, *Dulle Greet*, and *The Triumph of Death*—describe supernatural, or rather subnatural, scenes. The others deal either with Biblical subjects or with landscapes and genre. These are in the majority if we add the *Proverbs*, *Children's Games*, the *Land of Cockaigne*,† the *Fight between Carnival and Lent*, and other works from Flemish folklore.

Brueghel was mainly concerned with the Flemish peasantry at work and at play. His Kermesses and banqueting scenes started a tradition which was followed by Rubens, Jordaens and Teniers, but his art was more than descriptive. Modern critics have pointed out that he was strongly influenced by the writers of the period and that he shared their hostility towards its social abuses. Antwerp had become a great centre, not only of trade, but also of finance and banking; and industry thrived on the exploitation of labour, especially in the countryside. There is no doubt that this hostility against usury and other abuses reveals itself in some of the master's engravings and paintings. We should beware, however, of stressing this point too far. Some remarks made by George Saintsbury concerning Rabelais, whose writings might have been known to Brueghel, apply equally well to the French writer and to the Flemish painter: "He was neither an earnest philosopher—as some contend—nor a rollicking, care-free humourist . . ." He was, no doubt, "penetrated with the instincts and ideas of the early Renaissance and its efforts towards religious and social reforms," but "he was a satirist before being a reformer and, with a few exceptions . . . cannot be said to pursue any propaganda."

Brueghel was not, as some critics used to describe him, an ignorant peasant of outstanding genius; but, like Rabelais, he had a sense of humour which belongs essentially to the people. He shared their laughter and their coarseness, but he also expressed what they could feel instinctively, their love of nature and their sense of colour. His most biting satires are redeemed by the extraordinary beauty of their setting. It is the contrast between laughter and contemplation which gives him a unique position in the history of Flemish art.

The most important representative of the Brueghel School is his own son, also called Pieter II, or Pieter the Younger. He copied and reinterpreted a number of works of his father with so much talent that, in certain instances, it is difficult to say if some unsigned work should be attributed to the master or to his disciple. Other landscape and genre painters, such as Grimmer (*c.* 1526–*c.* 1589) and Luc van Valckenburgh (*c.* 1530–*c.* 1625) set the fashion for drinking scenes and winter landscapes which still prevailed at the beginning of the 17th century.

The great masters of the post-Renaissance were too absorbed in fulfilling the commissions given them by their august patrons and by the Church to devote much time to pictures which appealed mainly to the bourgeoisie. Genre scenes were nevertheless so congenial to the Flemish temperament that the Rubens studio produced a large number of hunting scenes and still life destined to decorate the halls and dining rooms of nobles and merchants. Among the collaborators attached to the studio, we find Jan Brueghel (1568–1625), son of Pieter the Elder, who specialised in flowers and landscape, Snyders † (1579–1657), who distinguished himself as a painter of animals and still life, not to mention Paul de Vos (*c.* 1590–1678), Fyt (1611–1661), and a number of artists of great talent whose reputations are overshadowed by those of their great leaders.

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† Plate 33

Rubens delighted in studies from animal life and, in one striking instance—the *Kermesse* in the Louvre—showed what he might have achieved in genre scenes if circumstances had been more favourable. But Jacob Jordaens ‡ (1593–1678) may be considered as the direct successor of the realists of the 16th century. With regard to design and composition, he may have been influenced by Aertsen; in spirit he comes very near to Brueghel. Like Rubens and Van Dyck he painted great portraits, religious and allegorical pictures, but unlike them he found many opportunities of describing the popular life of his time. He revelled in banqueting scenes, such as *The Young Whistle when the Old Sing* (Antwerp), and *The King Drinks* (Brussels). He described the love-making of fruit-sellers and kitchen wenches with abundant good humour and vitality, and the coarseness of some of his works escapes the taint of vulgarity. He stood somewhat aloof from the Rubens studio, and towards the end of his life came into close contact with Holland and joined the Protestant Church.

Dutch influence is also noticeable in the works of Brouwer § (1605–1638), who returned to Brueghel's scheme of composition. While Jordaens and, later, Teniers showed the pleasant side of popular life, Brouwer insisted on its cruelty and brutality. He sought his inspiration in village inns, and painted scenes of drunkenness without any attempt to minimise their bestiality. Only a great painter, a master of light and shade, could succeed in restoring the balance between violence and repose which is the condition of a great work of art. To say that Brouwer succeeded in achieving this result in his tavern brawls is to place him very high in the hierarchy of Flemish art.

David Teniers the Younger † (1610–1690) was the son and grandson of genre-painters and depended also, to some extent, on the Brueghel tradition. His extraordinary gifts as a colourist and the ease with which he varied his compositions soon gave him a reputation which was beyond his true merit. He became the Court painter of the Spanish governors, and settled in Brussels about 1650, but his reputation soon extended to France and other countries; and his pictures are in every museum.

If Brouwer may be considered as "unpleasant," Teniers is almost too "pleasant." He has been reproached for describing popular dances and festivities at a time when the country passed through a severe economic crisis and when famine threatened the land. But a picture, even a genre picture, must not necessarily fulfil the conditions of an accurate historical document. The same reproach might be addressed to Jordaens. The weakness of Teniers lies in the monotony of his themes and their superficial interpretation. Like some of the Dutch "small masters" of the period, he is too sure of his effects, and repeats them again and again until they lose their freshness and spontaneity. It is difficult to decide whether this extraordinary facility made him popular or whether popularity and the desire to satisfy the exigencies of his patrons induced him to rely on his technique more than on his inspiration.

Teniers' influence only produced imitators without outstanding merit in the following period. When art revived in Belgium in the 19th century, the fashion for light-hearted Kermesses had worn out and Teniers had lost in his own land a great deal of the reputation which he still preserved abroad.

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† Plates 36 and 37 ‡ Plate 14 § Plate 38

† Plate 39

VI. MODERN BELGIAN SCHOOL

BEFORE dealing with Belgian painting in the 19th century, attention should be drawn to the partial eclipse of Belgian art in the 18th century. Out of seven hundred exhibits shown at the great Flemish Exhibition held at Burlington House in 1927, six only belonged to that period. A few good painters could be mentioned, but none of outstanding originality. The glorious tradition established in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance and post-Renaissance seemed completely broken. There is an obvious explanation for this decadence and for the revival which took place in the 19th century. The eclipse is not only artistic, it is also economic and political. In the later years of the Spanish régime and under Austrian domination, Belgian national life had reached its lowest ebb. There was no energy to be spared for art and literature at a time when the people had to struggle hard to keep alive and when they were constantly threatened by foreign invasion. It was only when political independence was achieved after 1830 that artists and writers could express themselves freely in a free country.

We should, however, qualify this statement. It does not explain why painting continued to flourish during most of the Spanish régime, which was more oppressive than the Austrian régime, whereas under the rule of Maria Theresa sincere efforts were made to "encourage the arts." The eclipse may also be due to the fact that no great personality arose in the country capable of overcoming these obstacles. The people seemed to have lost confidence in themselves. They looked abroad, particularly to France, for inspiration; and as French culture pervaded Europe at that time, it seemed hopeless to compete with it. Voltaire wrote, after a visit to Belgium, in 1738: "The Arts do not dwell in Brussels, neither do the Pleasures; a retired and quiet life is here the lot of nearly all, but this quiet life is so like tedium that the one may easily be taken for the other."

It is significant that the first modern painter of note, Navez (1787–1869), was a pupil of David and modelled himself on the French painters of the First Empire; and that the leaders of the renaissance which took place after 1830, such as Gallait (1810–1887) and Wiertz (1806–1865), were strongly influenced by French romanticism, particularly in their historical paintings. An exception should, however, be made in favour of Henri Leys (1815–1869).

It was not until the middle of the 19th century that Belgian art reasserted itself. Its most original productions, though less ambitious than those of these early decorative painters, dealt with interior scenes and landscapes. The name of De Braekeleer † (1840–1888) stands out as that of a master of colour. He was a pupil of Leys but was mainly influenced by the small masters of the 17th century, and he brought art once more into close contact with the life of the people. His contemporary, Alfred Stevens ‡ (1828–1906)—who should not be confused with the English artist of the same name—was essentially the painter of the *élégantes* of Brussels and Paris, where he spent the latter years of his life, but his workmanship and his sense of colour were not affected by his social surroundings. His portraits are also interior scenes: like De Braekeleer, he succeeded in bringing life and significance into every detail of his compositions.

Stevens, however, stood as an exception. The majority of the best painters of the period, such as Degroux (1825–1870) and Léon Frédéric (1856–1940), dealt with their subject in a sterner mood. Without indulg-

† Plate 40 ‡ Plate 41

ing in cheap propaganda, they expressed their sympathy for the life of the poor, whether industrial worker or peasant, as Jean François Millet had already done in France. Life was not more tragic for the people than in the 17th century, but artists had become more sensitive to their suffering. The realistic reaction asserted itself in art as it asserted itself in literature, a realism akin to that of Brueghel.

As Rubens had been the main artistic influence in Belgium during the first half of the 19th century, Brueghel came to the fore towards the end. Both writers and painters appreciated more and more his sincerity, his humour and his scorn of conventions. It was the time when a rising socialism came into conflict with the conservatism of the bourgeoisie, and when the political atmosphere was to a certain extent similar to that of the 16th century. Brueghel became the fashion among a number of *littérateurs* and art critics, but he was more than a fashion with an artist like Laermans † (1864–1940), who assimilated his spirit and to a certain extent his technique.

It was " in the manner of Brueghel " that religious subjects were reintroduced into Belgian art by painters such as Ensor (born 1860), Jacob Smits ‡ (1856–1928), Donnay (1862–1921), Anto Carte and Gustave van de Woesteyne. The first produced fantastic visions akin to the old " devilries " of Brueghel and Bosch. The others exploited with great effect the contrast between the Gospel episodes and the brutal reality of everyday life in modern surroundings or in Flemish or Walloon landscapes. It would be possible to quote scores of pictures of this kind, very different in treatment but very similar in spirit. Belgian art produced once more Flights into Egypt, Suppers at Emmaus, Nativities and Crucifixions, in which the clash between " what is " and " what should be " is strongly emphasised, and where mysticism and realism confront each other. The influence of Rembrandt is also noticeable in this respect.

Through this period, including the first years of the 20th century, portraits and landscapes were most popular in Belgium, as elsewhere in Europe. Strangely enough the first landscape painters, like Boulenger (1837–1874), did not go to Rubens for their inspiration. They depended mostly on the rising French School of landscape painters influenced by Constable, under the leadership of Théodore Rousseau and Courbet. Just as France had a School of Barbizon which aimed at bringing the artist closer to nature, Belgium had its School of Tervueren, then a small village close to Brussels, on the fringe of the Forêt de Soignes. Frans Courtens (born 1853) was one of its prominent members.

The French *luministe* movement, under Turner's influence, had also an echo in Belgium when Heymans (1839–1924) and, later, Emile Claus (1849–1924) gave it a Flemish expression. For it is worth notice that the distinction between the South and the North, which it is so difficult to make in the three great centuries of Belgian art, can be made in modern days. It is always dangerous to generalise in such matters, but on the whole the Walloon (or Southern) artists seem more attracted towards composition and design, while the Flemish (or Northern) artists are almost invariably drawn towards light and colour. This love for colour, for its own sake, remains to-day, as it was five centuries ago, the main characteristic of Flemish art. It is particularly conspicuous in the works of James Ensor,† who still is the foremost representative of contemporary Belgian art.

A last aspect of the activity of the modern Belgian School should not be omitted. Romanticism had excluded from art all subjects which did not lend themselves to idealisation, such as slums or factories. By the middle of the century, owing to its coalmines and the advantages of its trade communications, Belgium was in the forefront of European industrial countries. An army of new workers—in the mines and heavy

† Plate 42 ‡ Plate 43

† Plate 44

industries—arose, bringing with them a new kind of life in new surroundings. The countryside and its peasants could not retain exclusively the attention of artists born and bred in the districts of Mons, Charleroi or Liége. Constantin Meunier (1831–1905) was the first to place Belgian industrial life within the range of artistic expression. He is particularly known to-day for his sculptures, but began his career as a painter and draughtsman. His sketches of industrial life retain more than an historical interest. He had several followers, such as Paulus, who succeeded in translating the stern and sinister beauty of blast-furnaces and factory chimneys.

Those who study Flemish and Belgian art should never lose sight of the fact that, if it is of first importance in the past and remarkably rich in modern days, it never had a classical period. The 15th century belongs to the Middle Ages, the 16th and 17th to the Renaissance. There is nothing which might correspond to the age of Claude and Poussin in France, or to that of Gainsborough and Reynolds in England. The Church plays its part, the people play their part. The refined taste of the aristocracy is seldom represented.

In art as in literature, this opposition or association of realism and mysticism, of modernism and mediaevalism, is one of the outstanding characteristics of Belgian intellectual life. The political vicissitudes to which the country was subjected may have contributed to this apparent lack of balance between two opposite tendencies. But its origin lies deeper than that, in the very temperament of the people, which combines a strong sense of reality with a craving for absolute values, whether they seek to find either of these in their religious experience or in a political ideal.[1]

---

[1] I have been obliged to omit some important names: Félicien Rops, Louis Artan, Jan Stobbaerts, and Guillaume Vogels in the 19th century, and, later, Albert Baertsoen, Victor Gilsoul, Auguste Oleffe, and the landscape painters Valerius De Saedeleer and Gustave van de Woesteyne.

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CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF FLEMISH AND BELGIAN PAINTERS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

Melchior Broederlam, working end 14th century
Hubert van Eyck, *c.* 1370–1426
Robert Campin, 1375–1444
Jan van Eyck, *c.* 1380–1441
Roger de la Pasture (called Roger van der Weyden), 1400–1464
Jacques Daret, *c.* 1404–*c.* 1468
Petrus Christus, *c.* 1410–*c.* 1473
Dirk Bouts, *c.* 1415–1475
Simon Marmion, *c.* 1425–*c.* 1489
Hans Memlinc, *c.* 1430–1494
Hugo van der Goes, *c.* 1430–1482
Jerome Bosch, *c.* 1460–1516
Gerard David, *c.* 1460–1523
Albrecht Bouts, *c.* 1460–1549
Colyn de Coter, *fl.* 1460
Jan Prevost, *c.* 1462–1529
Quentin Metsys, *c.* 1466–1530
Jean Gossart de Mabuse, *c.* 1472–*c.* 1535
Henri Bles, *c.* 1480–*c.* 1550
Joachim Patinir, 1485–1524
Josse van Cleef, *c.* 1491–1540
Bernard van Orley, 1493–1542
Lucas de Leyde, 1494–1533
Marinus van Reymerswaele, 1497–*c.* 1560
Jan van Hemessen, 1504–1555
Pieter Aertsen, 1508–1575
Jan Massys, 1509–1575
Pieter Pourbus, *c.* 1510–1584
Adriaen Ysenbrant, *fl.*1510–1551
Frans Floris, *c.* 1517–1570
Antonio Moro, *c.* 1519–1576
Ambrosius Benson, *fl.* 1521–1550
Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *c.* 1525–1569
Jacob Grimmer, *c.* 1526–*c.* 1589
Joachim de Beuckelaer, 1530–1573
Luc van Valckenburgh, *c.* 1530–*c.* 1625
Martin de Vos, 1532–1603
Ambroise Francken, 1544–1618
Otto Venius, 1558–1629
Pieter Brueghel the Younger, 1564–*c.* 1637
Marc Gheeraerts the Elder, *fl.* 1566–1603
Jan Brueghel (the Velvet), 1568–1625
François Pourbus the Younger, 1569–1622
Peter Paul Rubens, 1577–1640
Frans Snyders, 1579–1657
Cornelis de Vos, 1585–1651
Jan Wildens, *c.* 1586–1653
Paul de Vos, *c.* 1590–1678
Jacob Jordaens, 1593–1678
Justus Sustermans, 1597–1681
Anthony van Dyck, 1599–1641
Adriaen Brouwer, 1605–1638
David Teniers the Younger, 1610–1690
Jan Fyt, 1611–1661
François Joseph Navez, 1787–1869
Antoine Joseph Wiertz, 1806–1865
Louis Gallait, 1810–1887
Henri Leys, 1815–1869
Charles Degroux, 1825–1870
Alfred Stevens, 1828–1906
Constantin Meunier, 1831–1905
Hippolyte Boulenger, 1837–1874
Adrien-Joseph Heymans, 1839–1924
Henri de Braekeleer, 1840–1888
Emile Claus, 1849–1924
Frans Courtens, born 1853
Jacob Smits, 1856–1928
Léon Frédéric, 1856–1940
James Ensor, born 1860
August Donnay, 1862–1921
Eugène Laermans, 1864–1940

ACKNOWLEDGMENT is made to Photo L'Epi for the provision of photographic prints for Plates 6, 20, 21, 36 and 37. Plates 32 and 35 were supplied by W. F. Mansell, and Plates 7 and 16 were obtained from Bulloz. Plates 9, 13, 18, 30 and 34 were supplied by Paul Becker, Donnay, William Gray, Alinari and Anderson respectively. Colour Plates 1 and 3 are reproduced by permission of Messrs. T. C. and E. C. Jack, and 2 and 4 by permission of The Medici Society.

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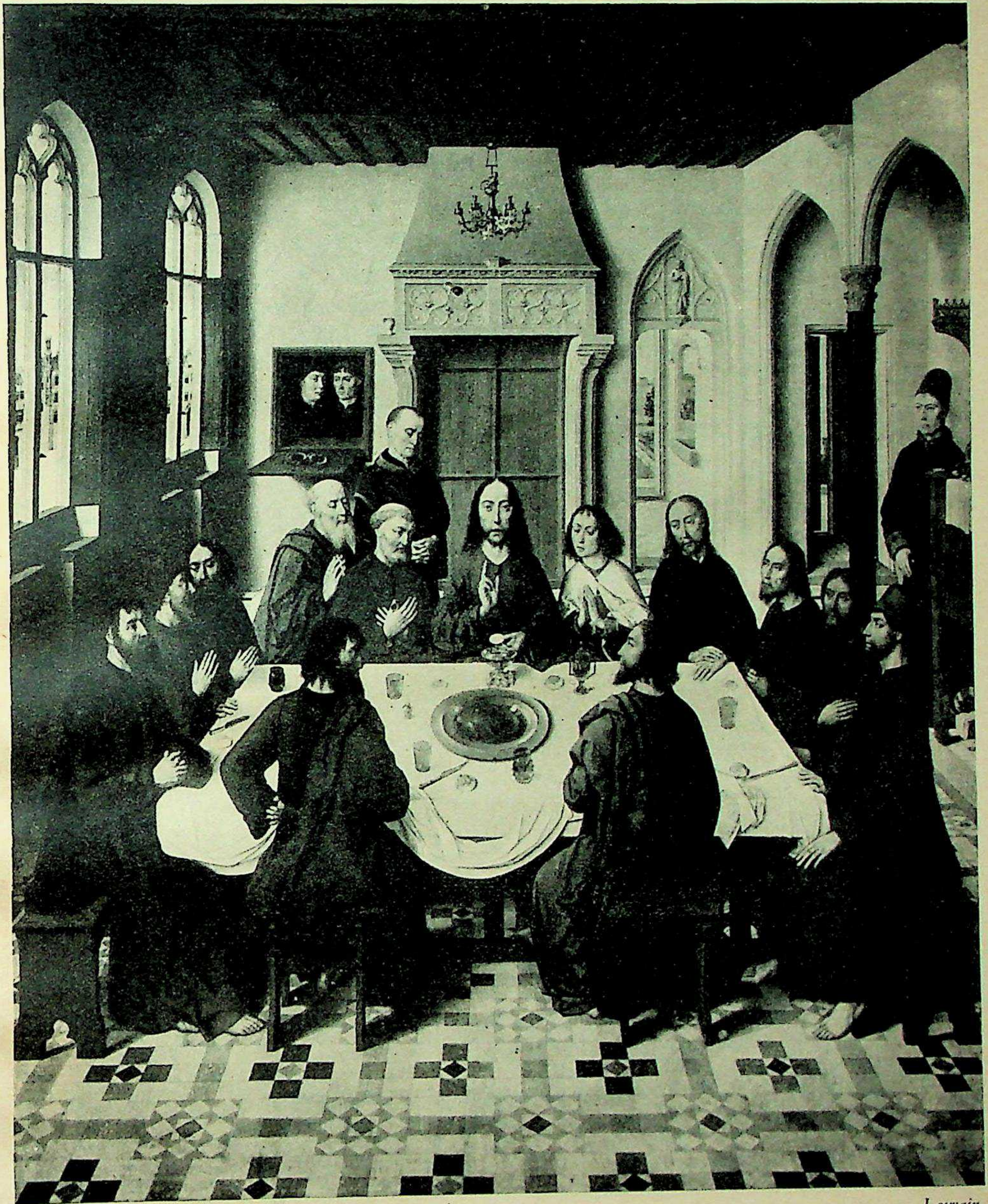


Louvain

Plate 5

THE LAST SUPPER *By Dirk Bouts* (*c.*1415-1475)

Original 71″ × 59½″

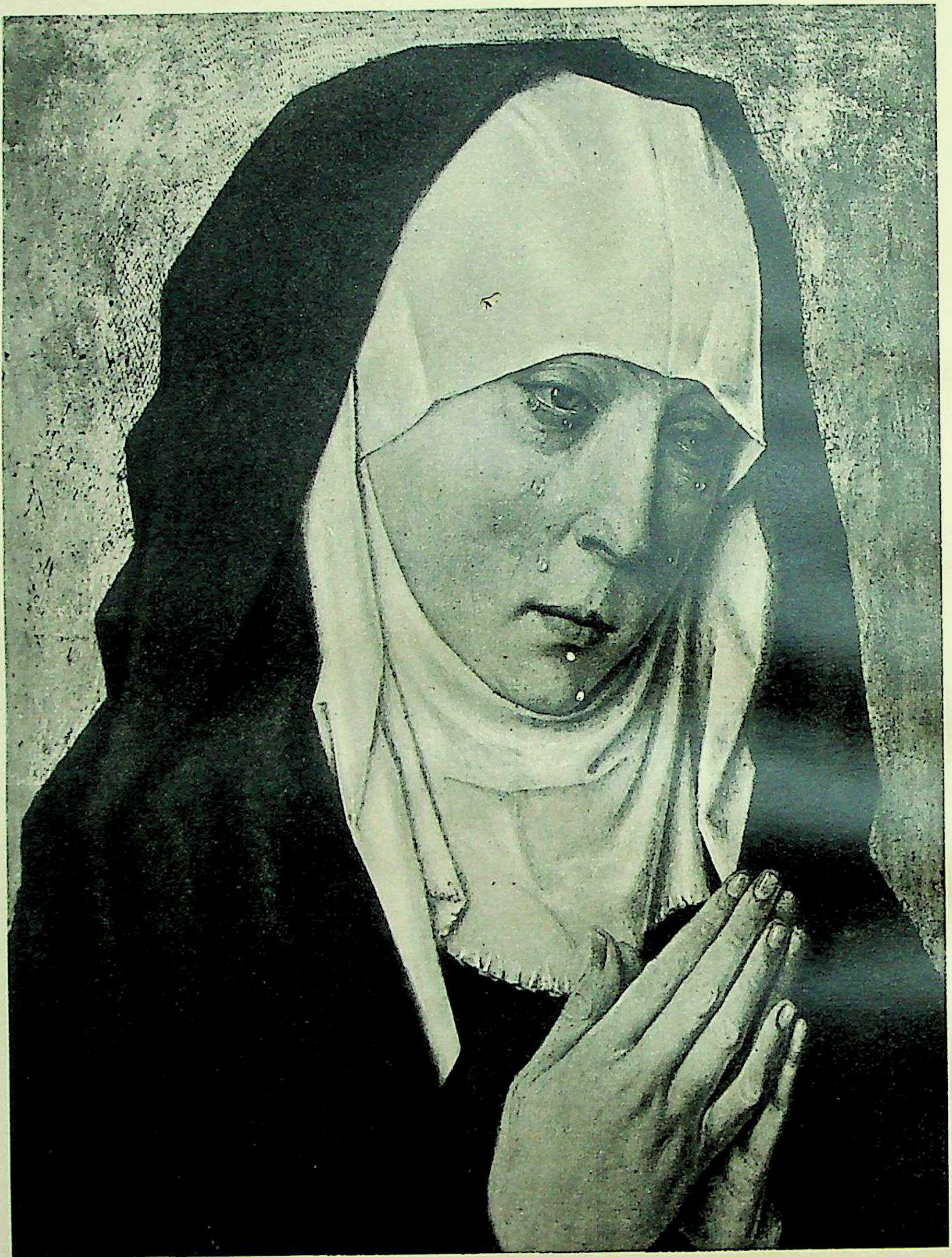
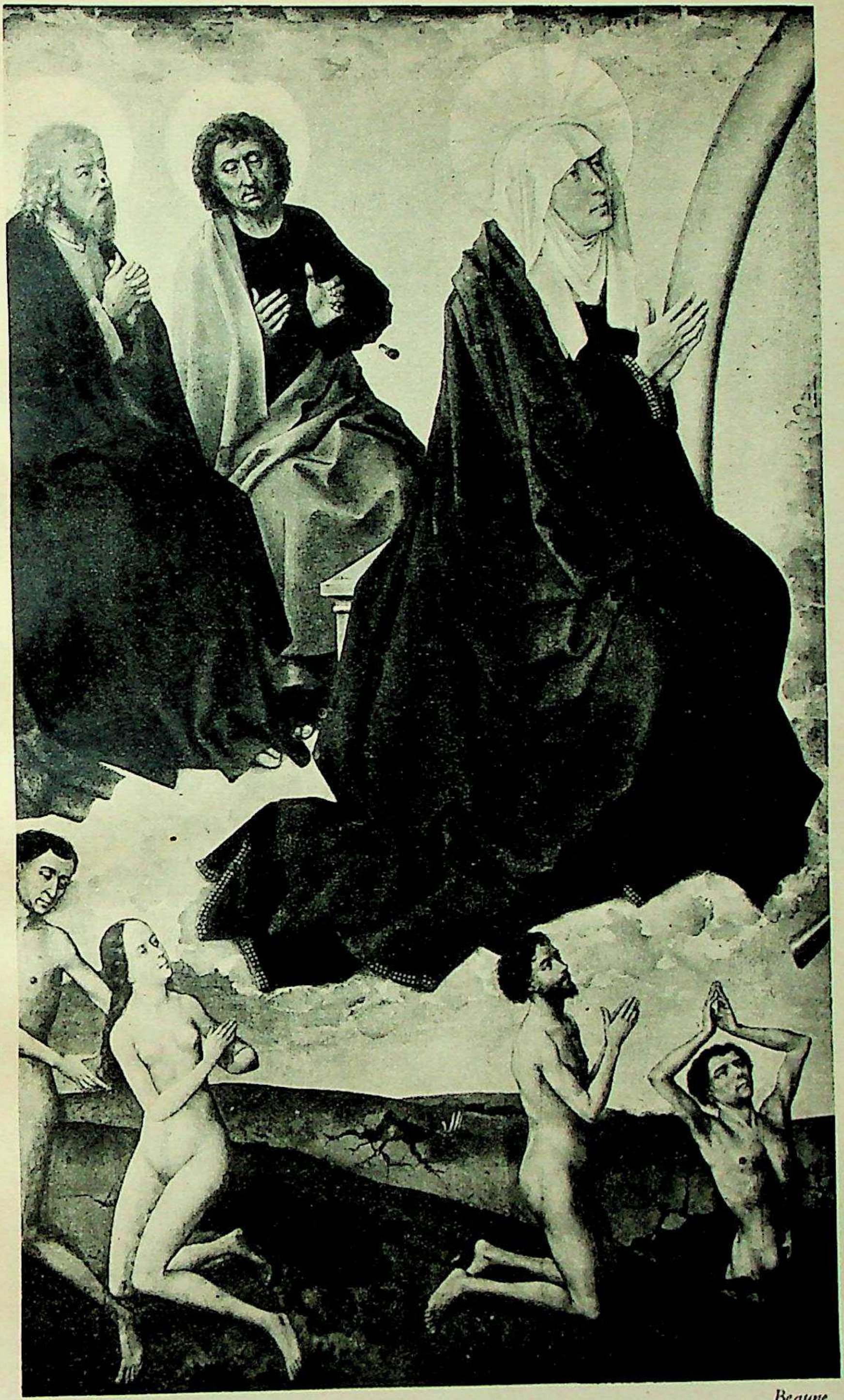


Plate 6 *Vienna*

OUR LADY OF TEARS *By Dirk Bouts* (*c.*1415-1475)

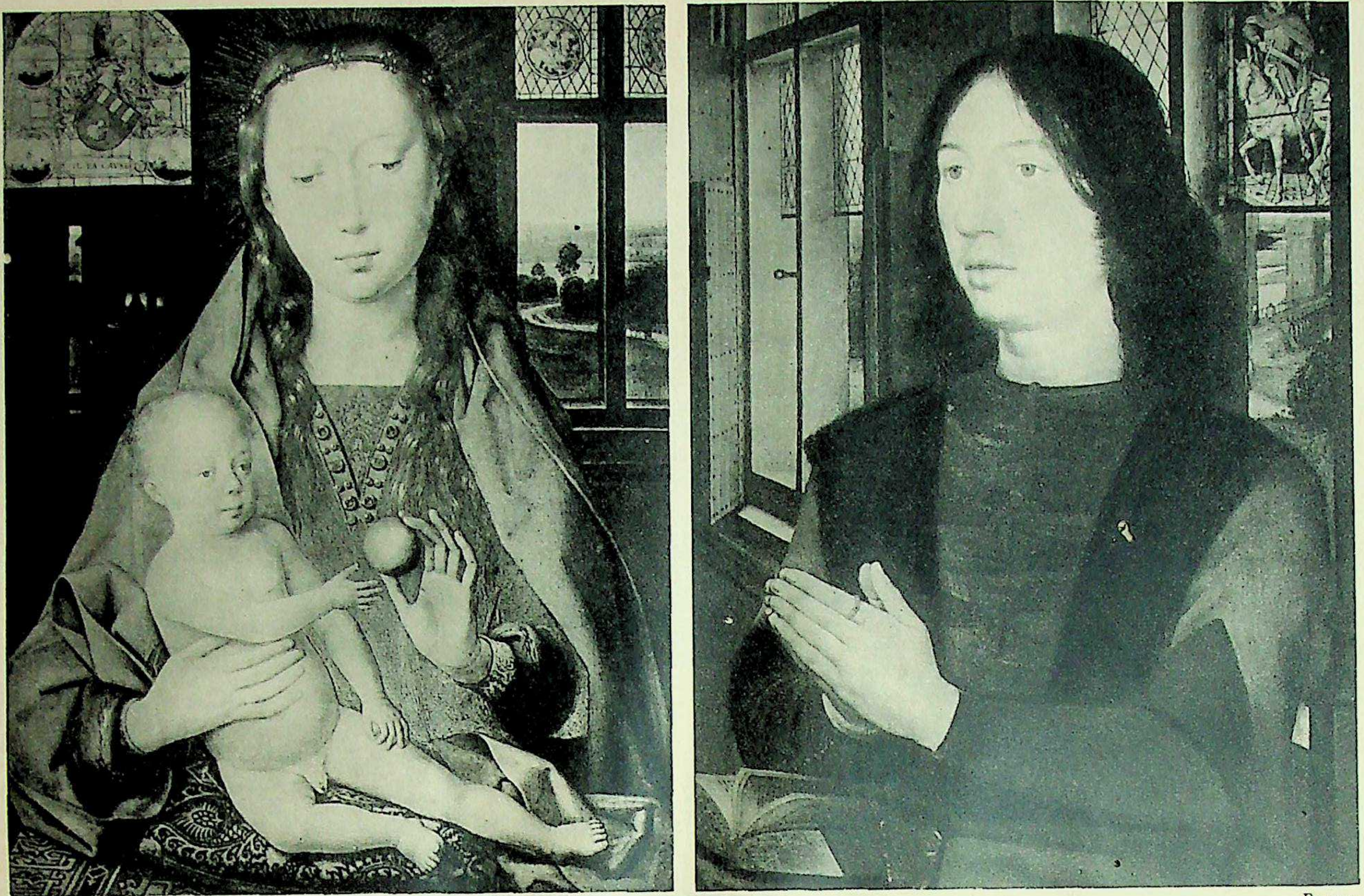
Original 14″ × 11″



Beaune

Plate 7

Detail from THE LAST JUDGMENT *By Roger van der Weyden* (*c*.1400-1464)

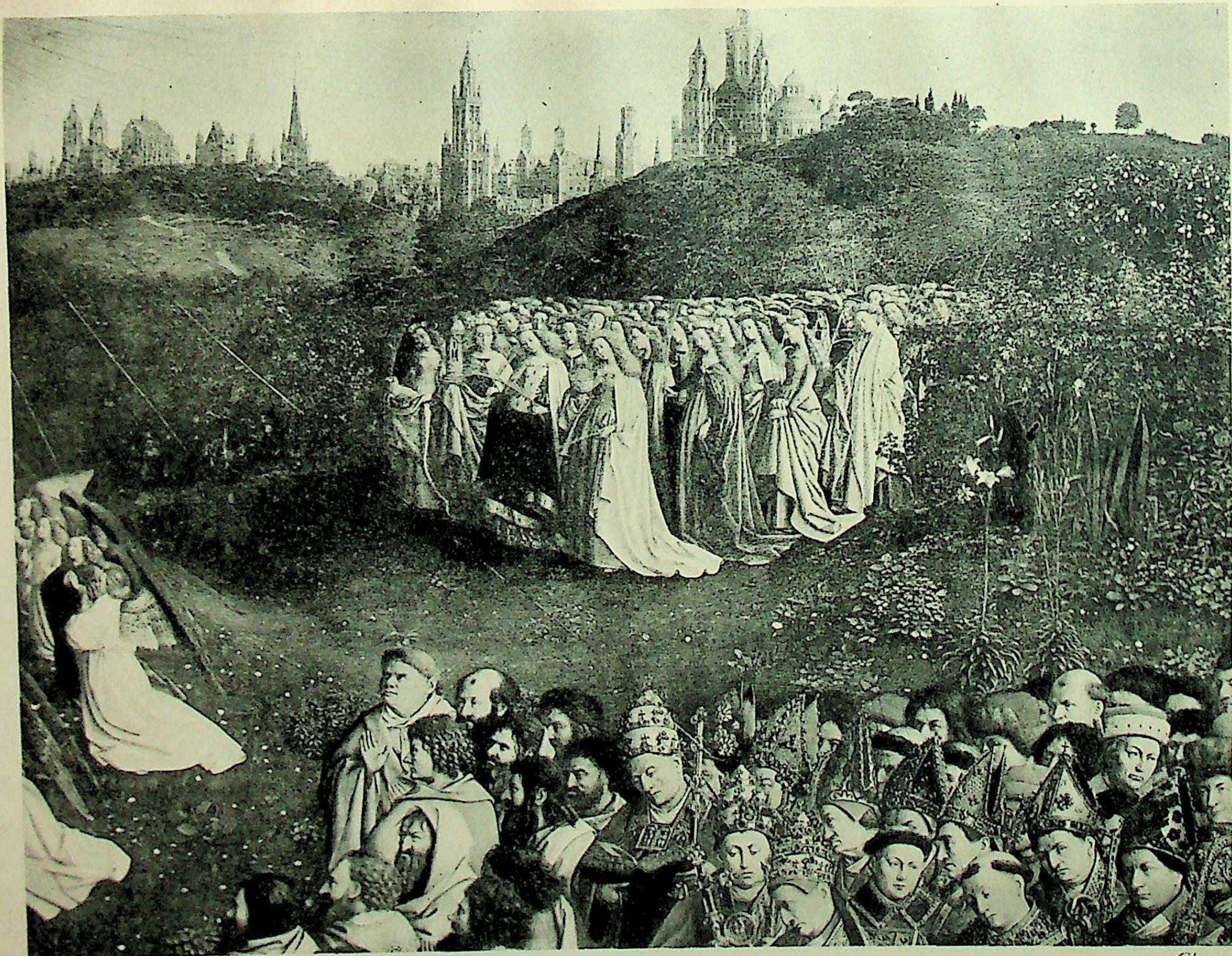


Bruges

Plate 8

Diptych VIRGIN AND DONOR, MARTIN VAN NIEUWENHOVE *By Hans Memlinc* (*c*.1430-1494)

Each panel 17½″ × 13″



Ghent

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VIRGIN AND MARTYRS Detail from THE ADORATION OF THE LAMB *By Hubert van Eyck* (*c*.1370-1426)

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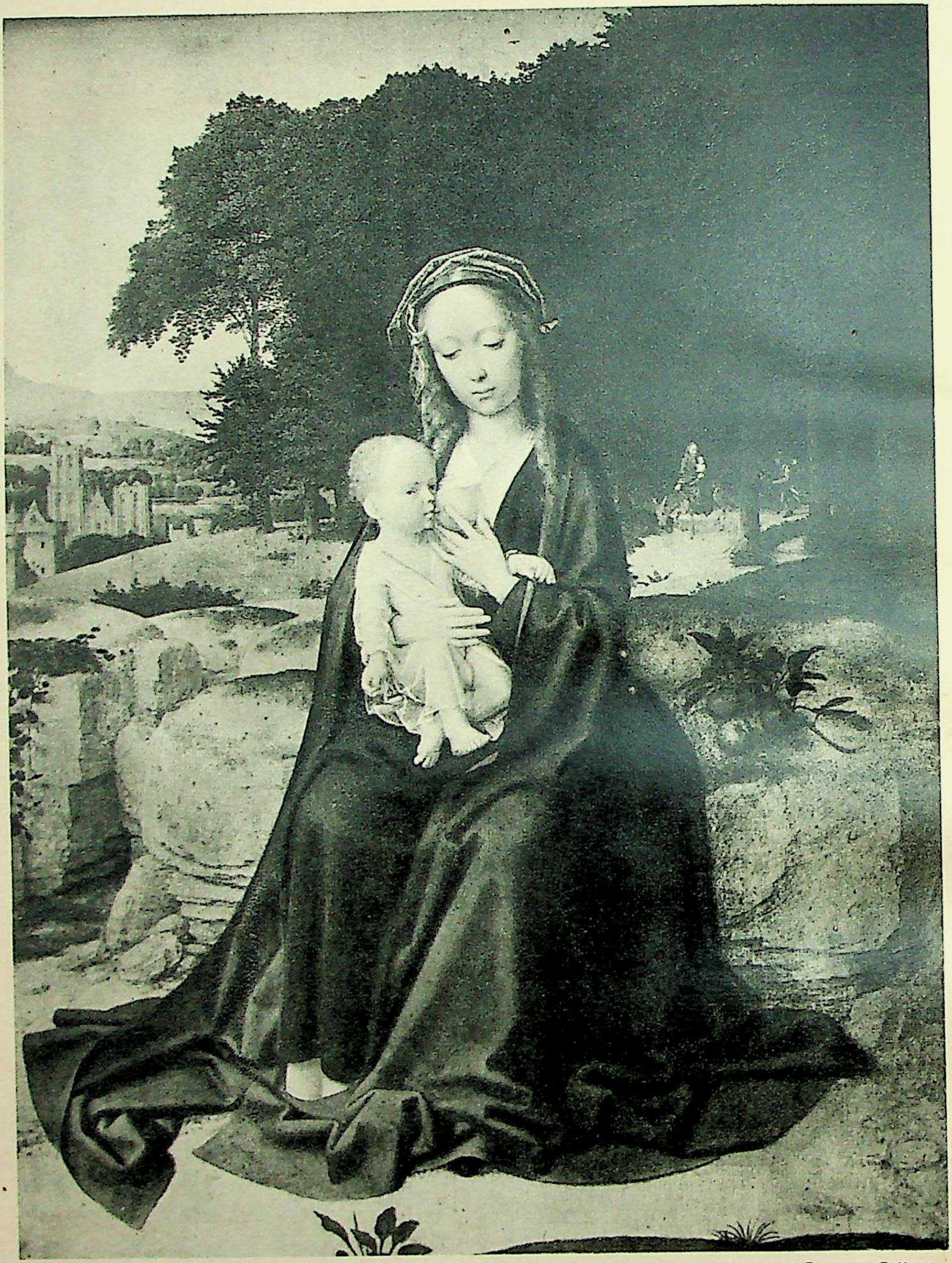
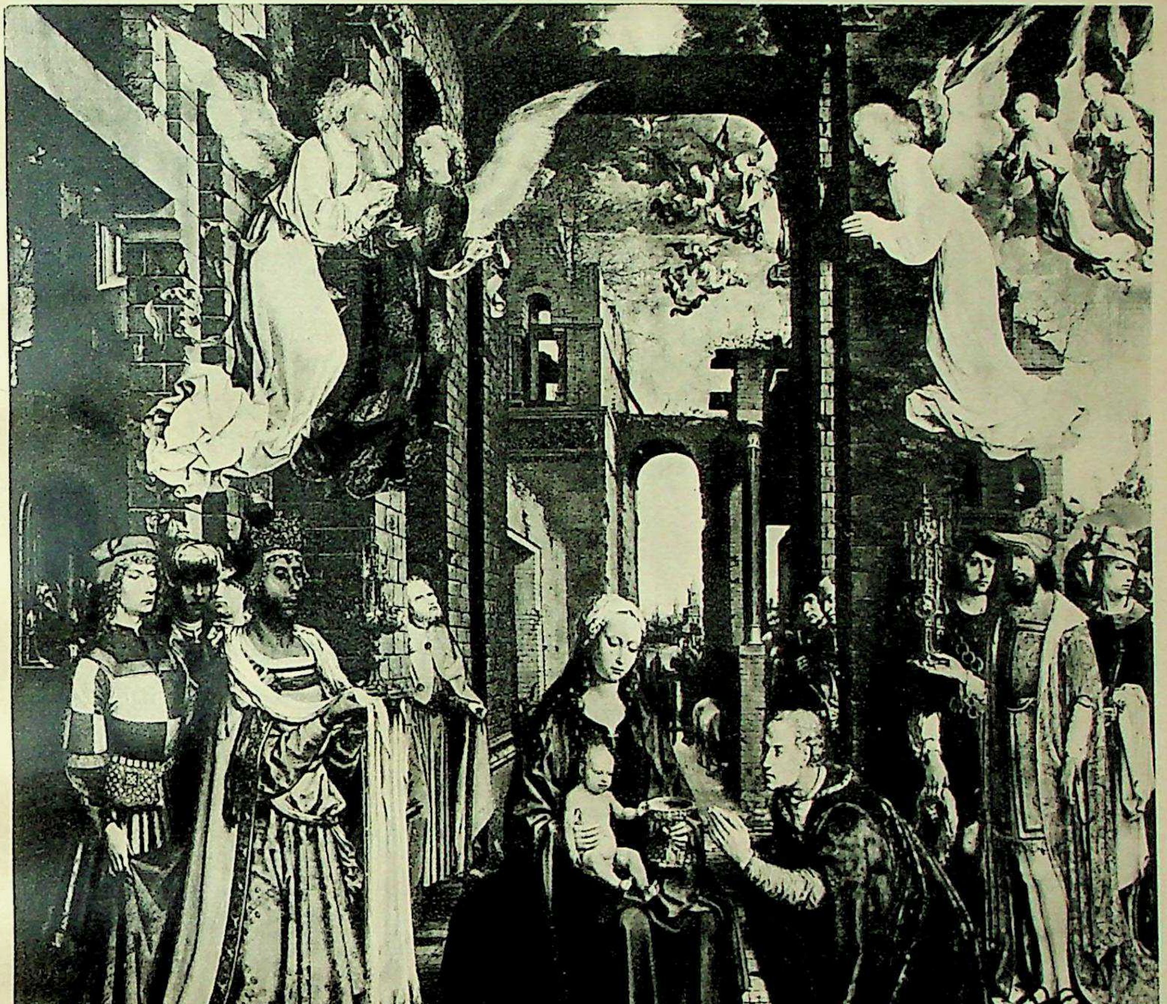


Plate 10

Private Collection

FLIGHT INTO EGYPT *By Gérard David* (*c.*1460-1523)

Original 20″ × 17″

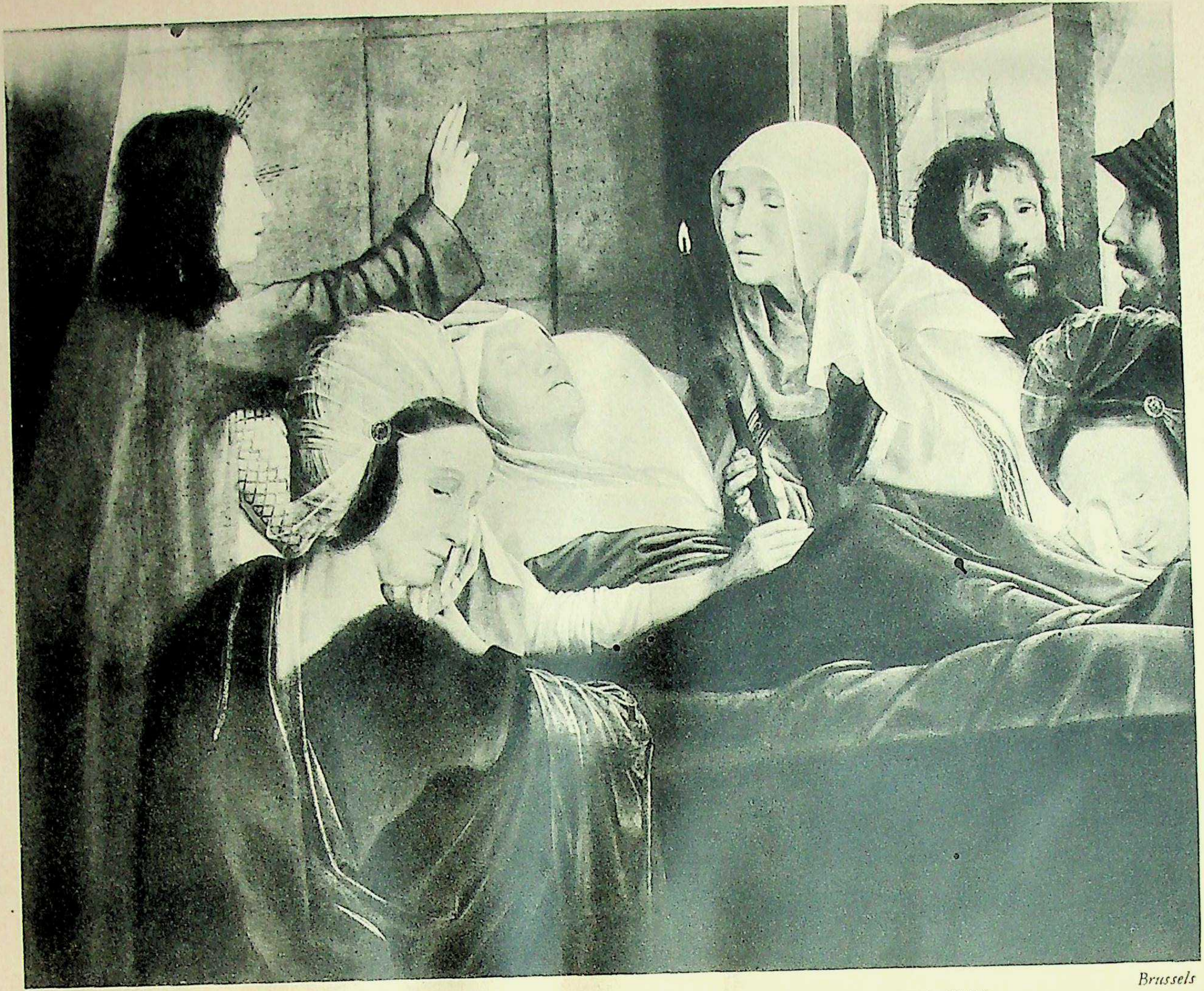


National Gallery

Plate 11

ADORATION OF THE KINGS *By Mabuse* (*c*.1472-*c*.1535)

Original 70″ × 64″



Brussels

Plate 12

DEATH OF ST. ANNE Detail from Triptych *By Quentin Metsys* (1466-1530)

Whole panel 86½″ × 36¼″

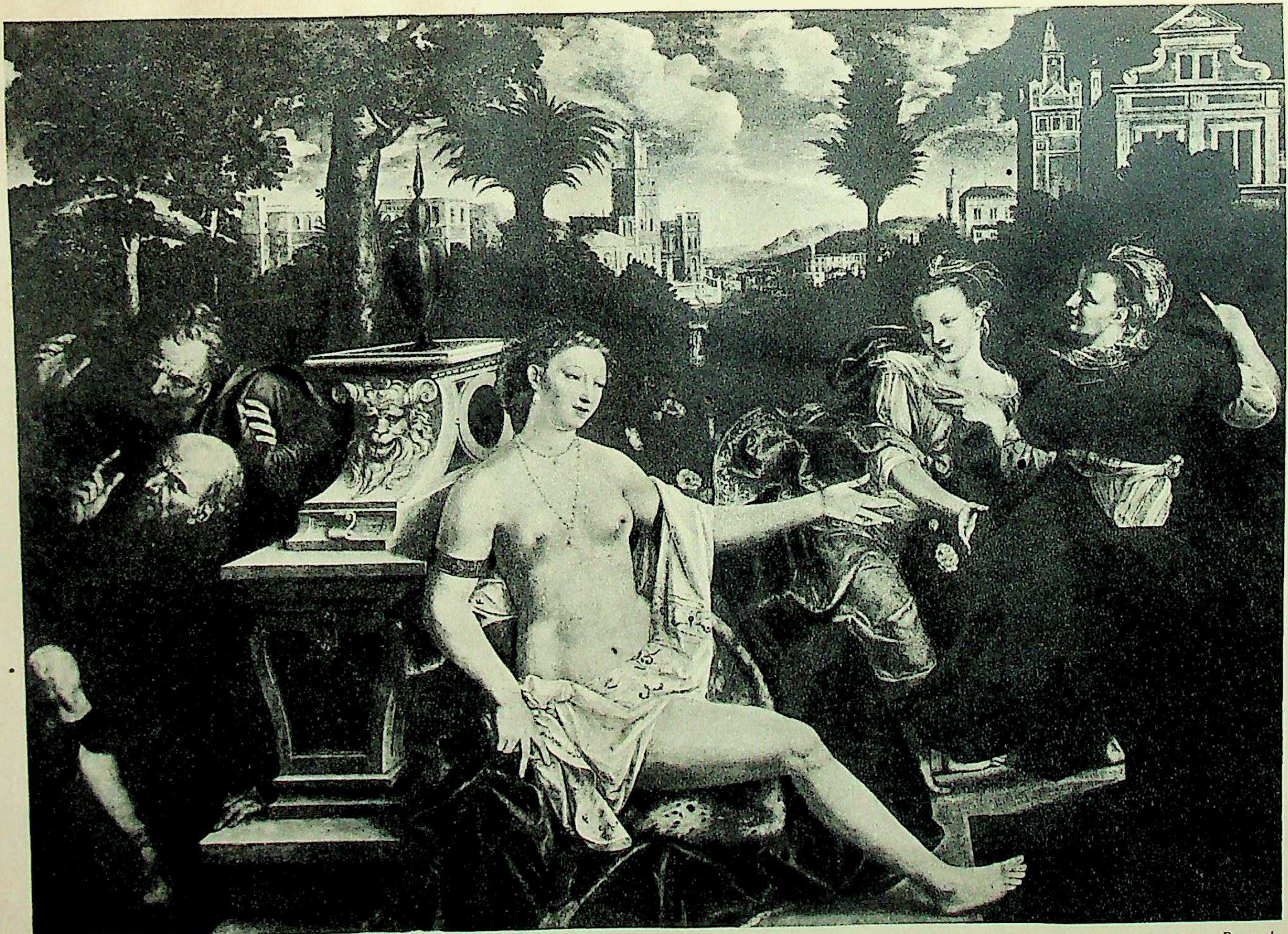
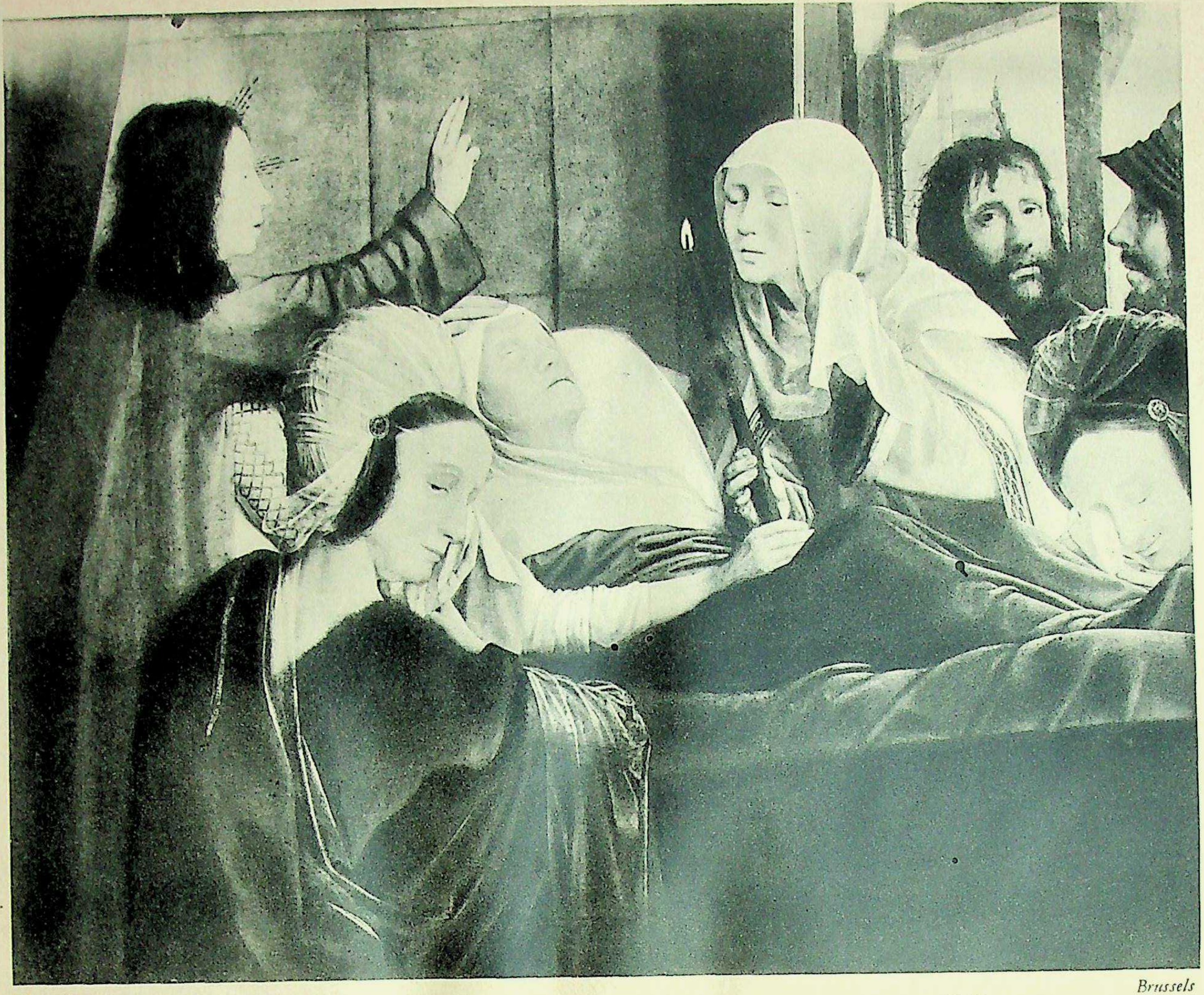


Plate 13

Brussels

SUSANNA AND THE ELDERS *By Jan Massys* (1509-1575)

Original 63½″ × 87½″



Brussels

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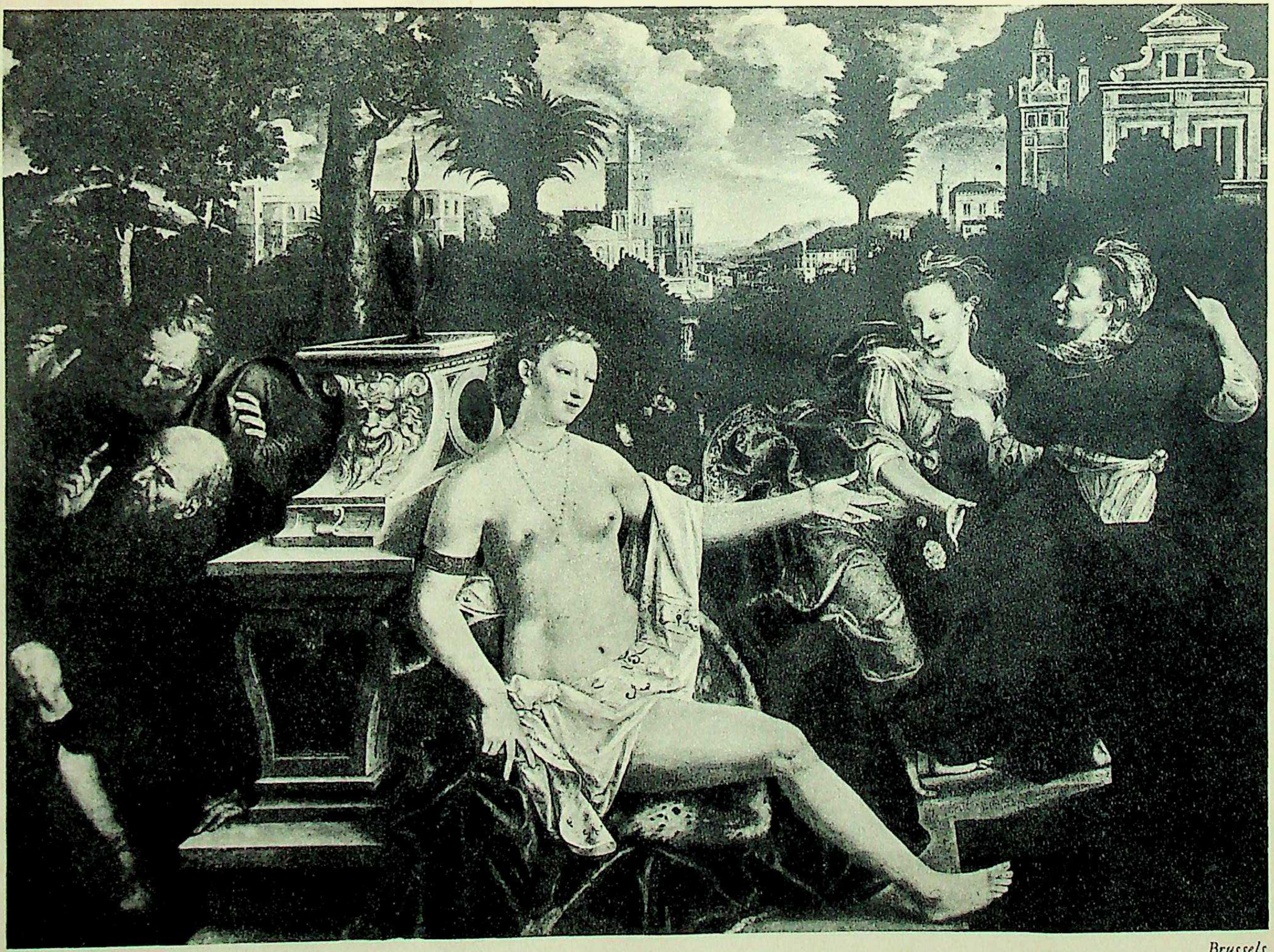

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Brussels

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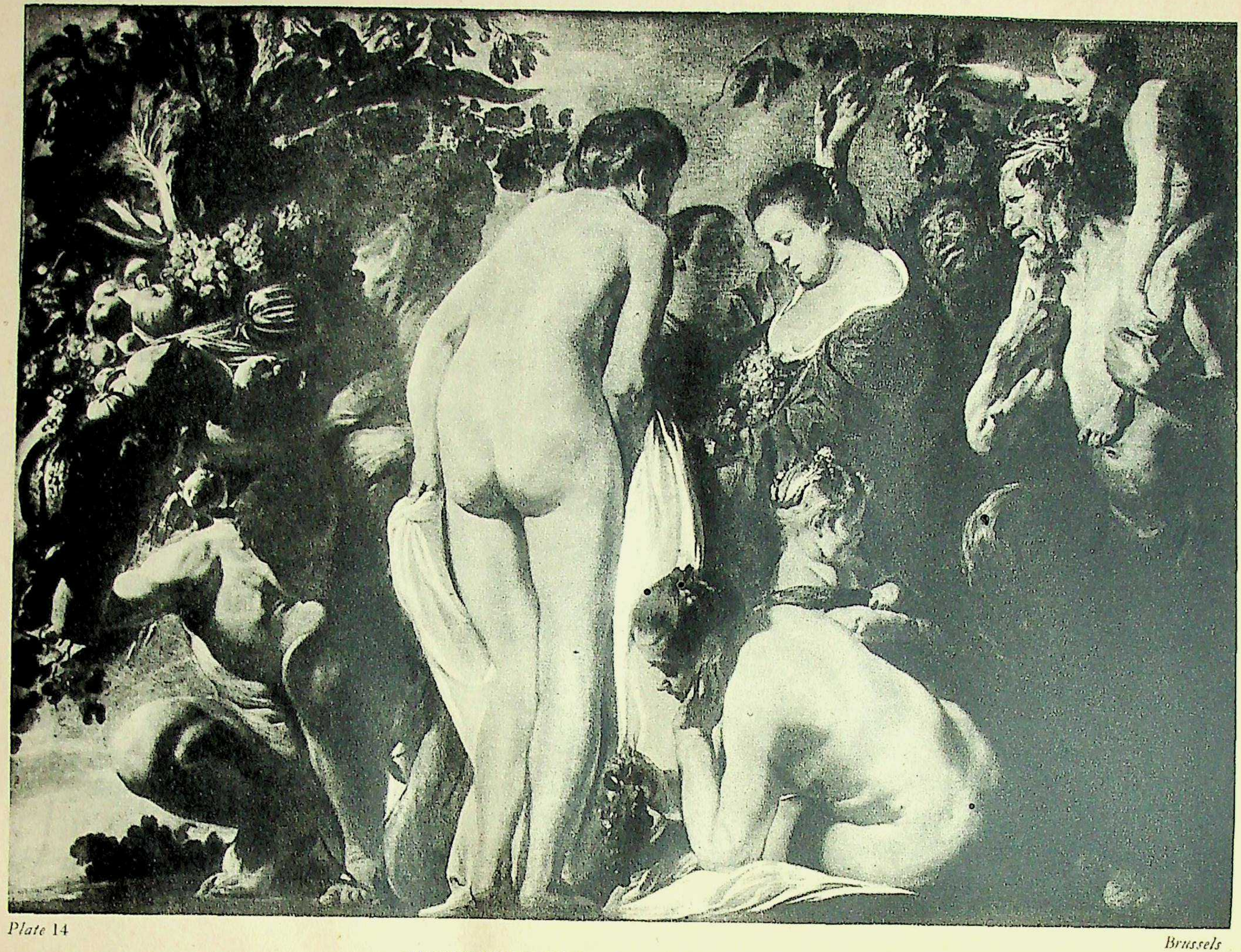

Plate 14

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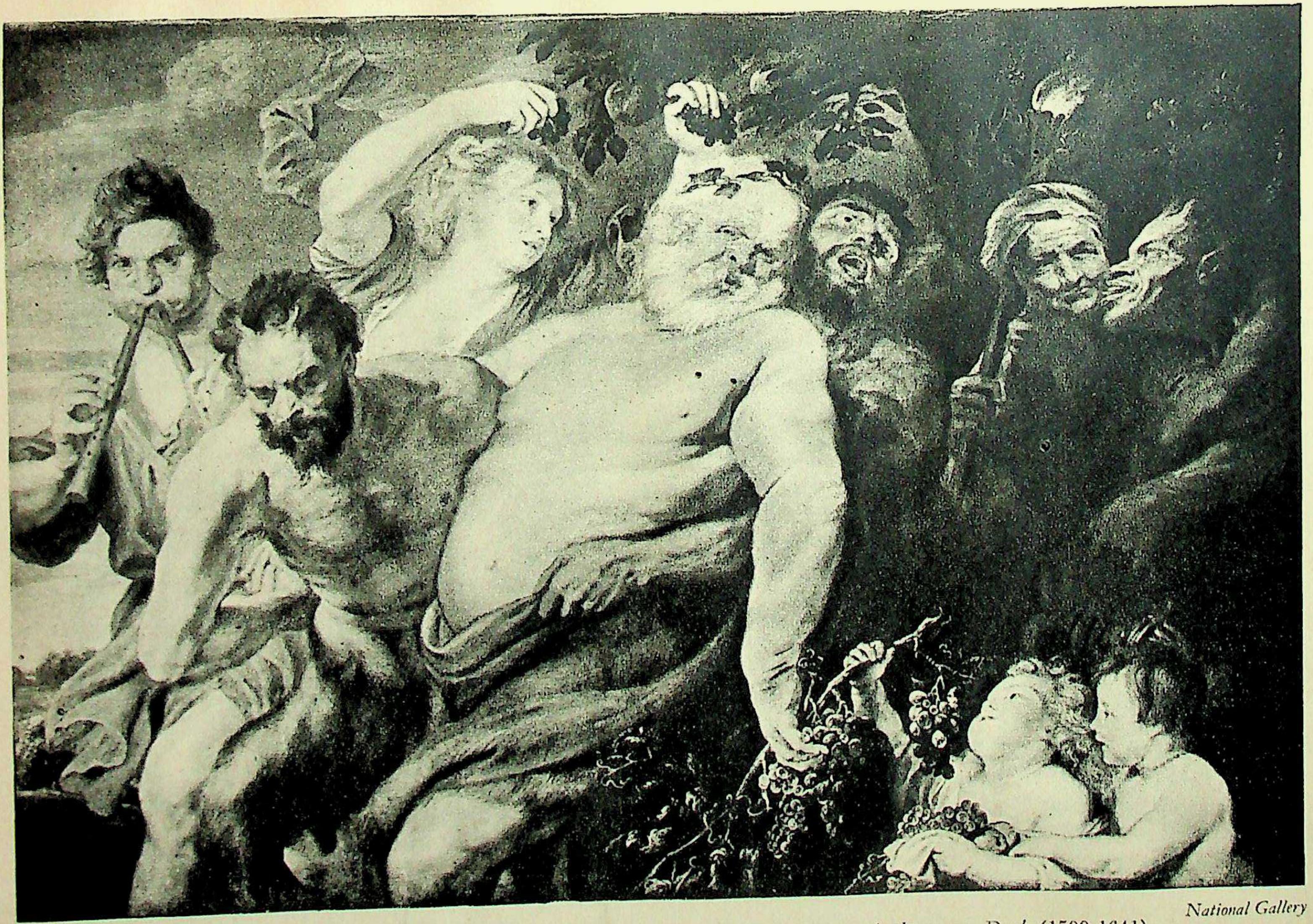
FRUITFULNESS *By Jacob Jordaens* (1593-1678)

Original 71″ × 95″



National Gallery

Plate 15

THE TRIUMPH OF SILENUS *By Peter Paul Rubens* (1577-1640) *or Anthony van Dyck* (1599-1641)

Original 54″ × 77½″

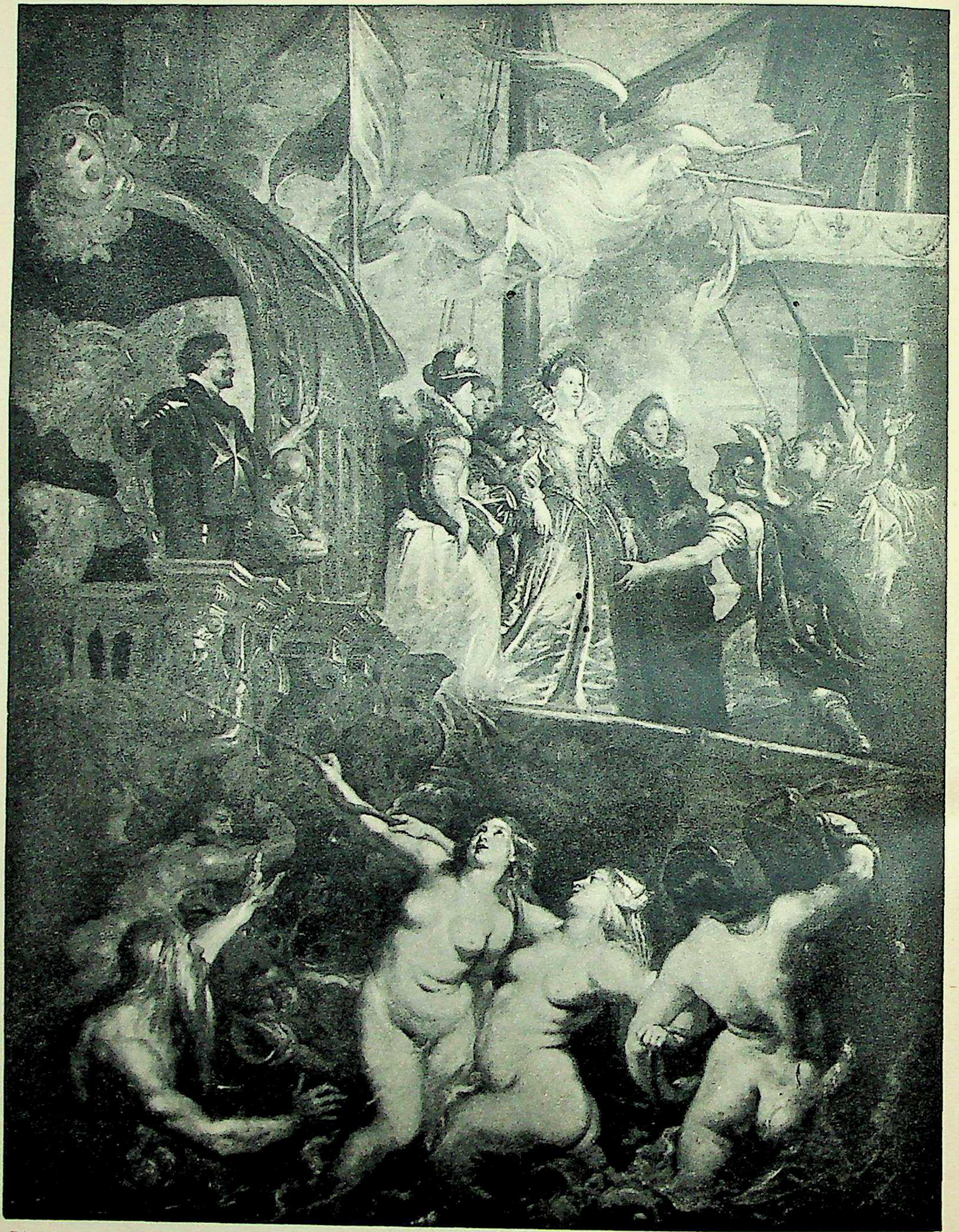


Plate 16

Louvre

MARIE DE MEDICI LANDING IN FRANCE *By Peter Paul Rubens* (1577-1640)

Original 155″ × 118″

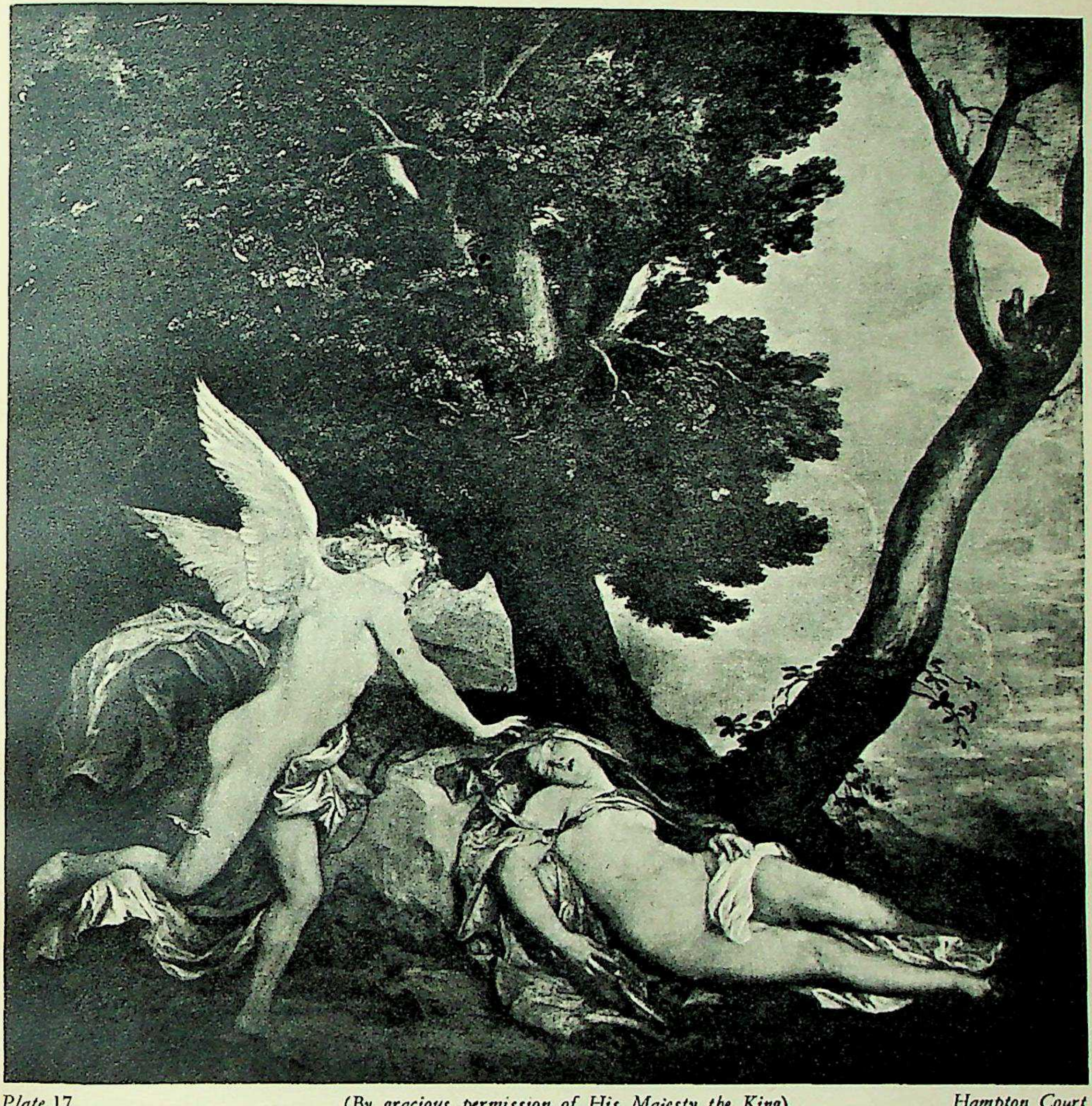
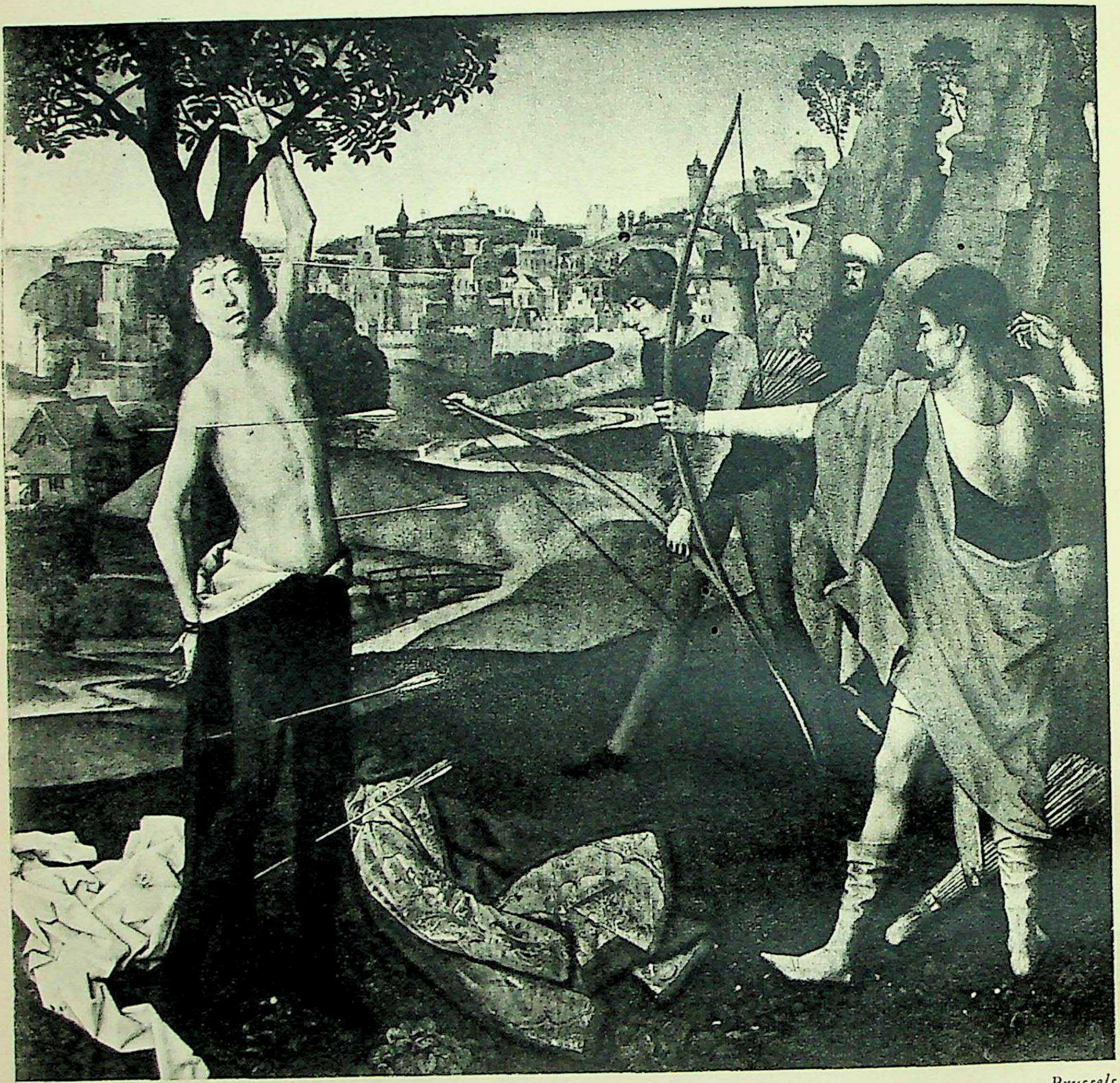


Plate 17 *(By gracious permission of His Majesty the King)* *Hampton Court*

CUPID AND PSYCHE *By Anthony van Dyck* (1599-1641)

Original 78″ × 77″

LANDSCAPE: Plates 18 to 23



Brussels

Plate 18

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. SEBASTIAN *By Hans Memlinc* (*c*.1430-1494)

Original 25″ × 26″

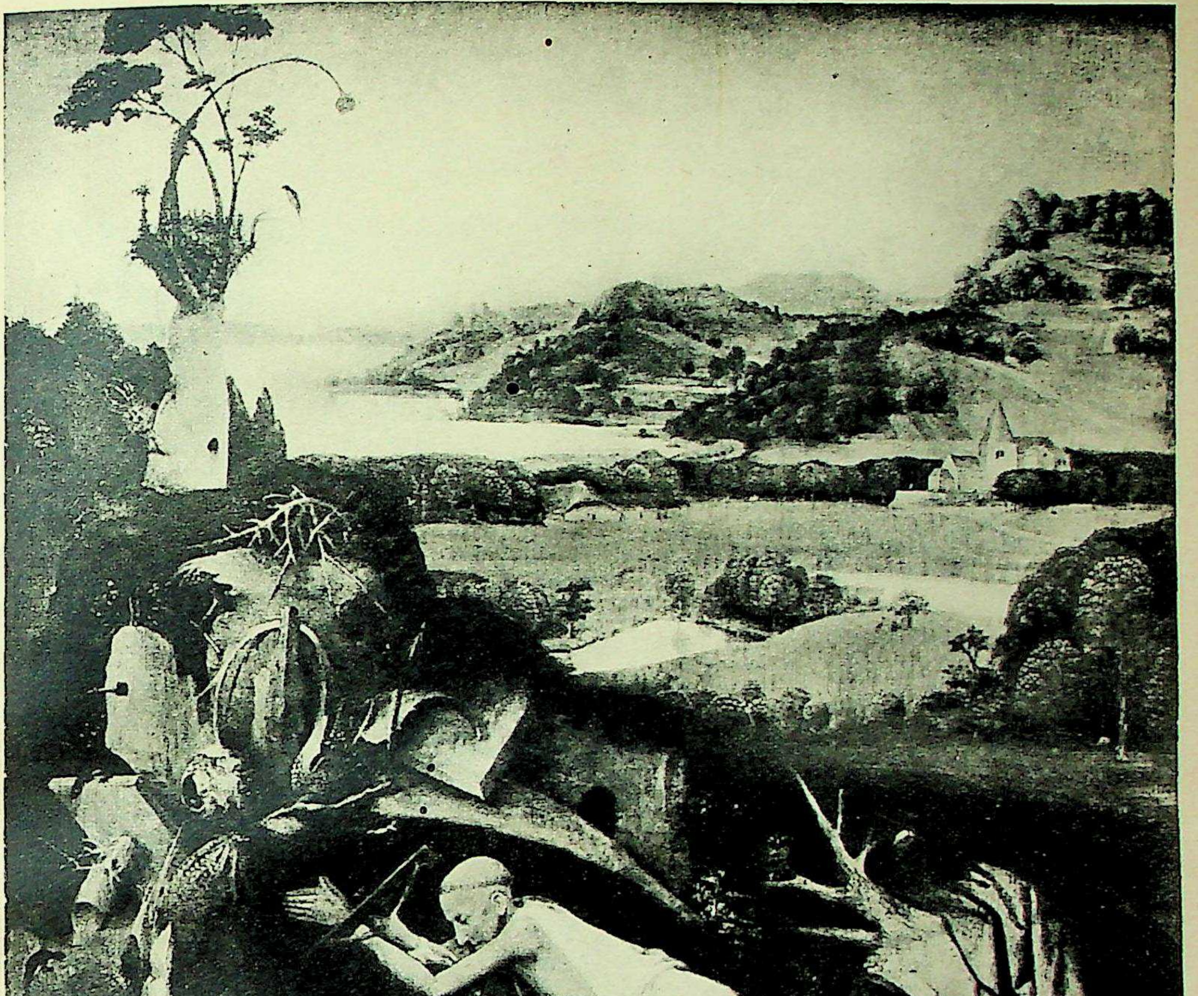


Plate 19

Ghent

ST. JEROME *By Jérome Bosch* (*c.*1460-1516)

Original 30½″ × 23½″

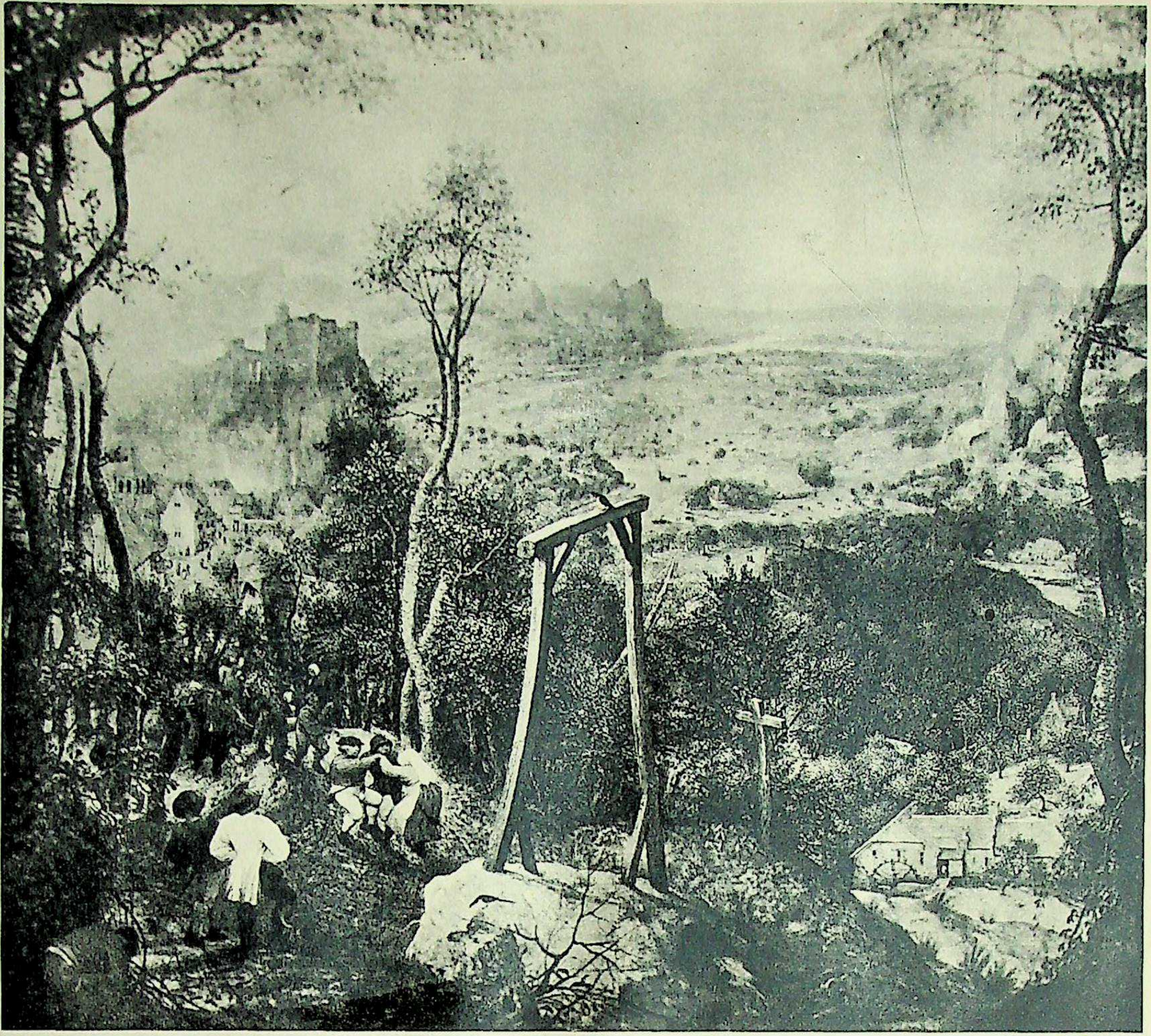
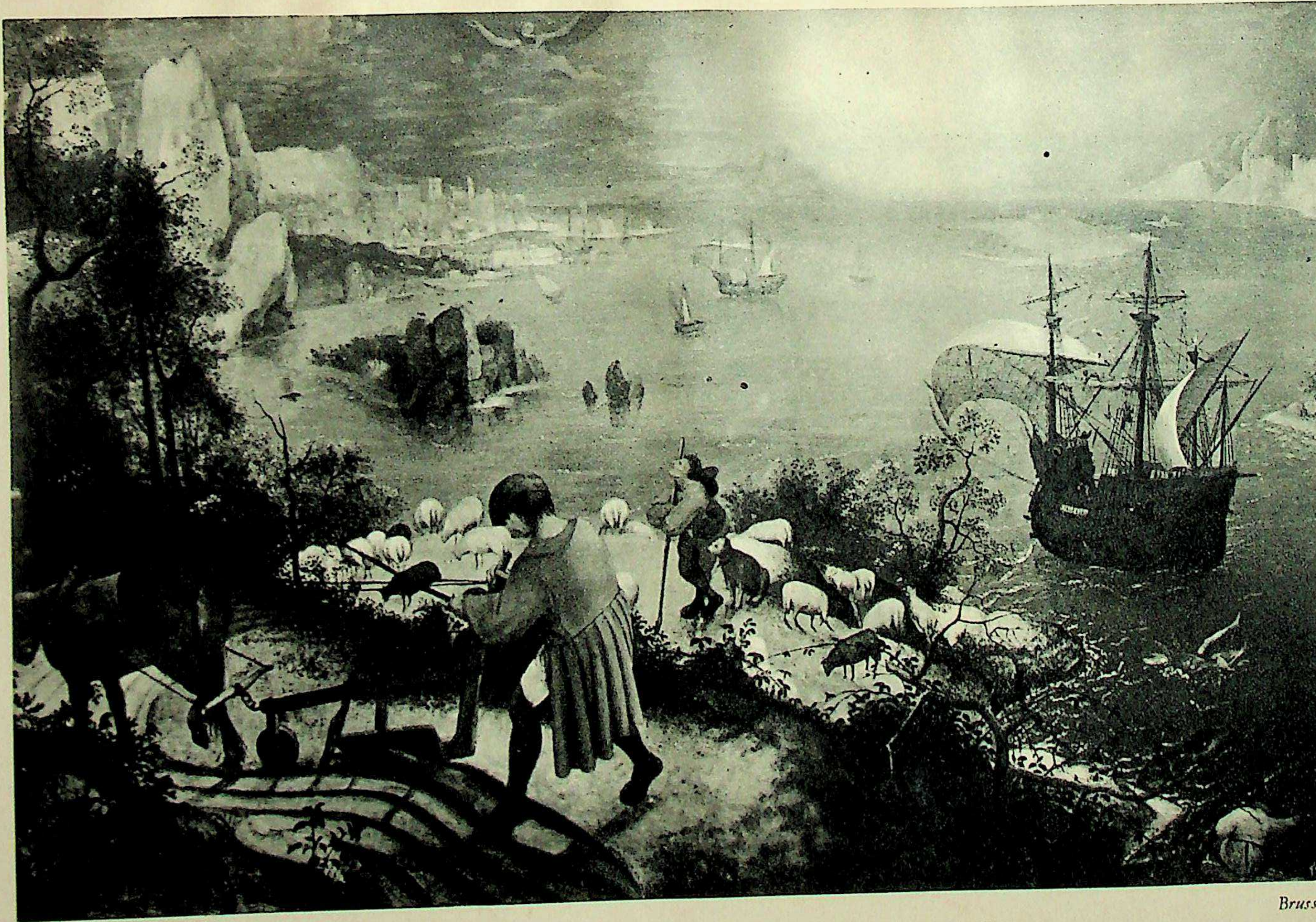


Plate 20

Darmstadt

THE MAGPIE ON THE GIBBET *By Pieter Brueghel the Elder* (*c*.1525-1569)

Original 18″ × 20″



Brussels

Plate 21

THE FALL OF ICARUS *By Pieter Brueghel the Elder* (*c.*1525-1569)

Original 28½″ × 43¾″

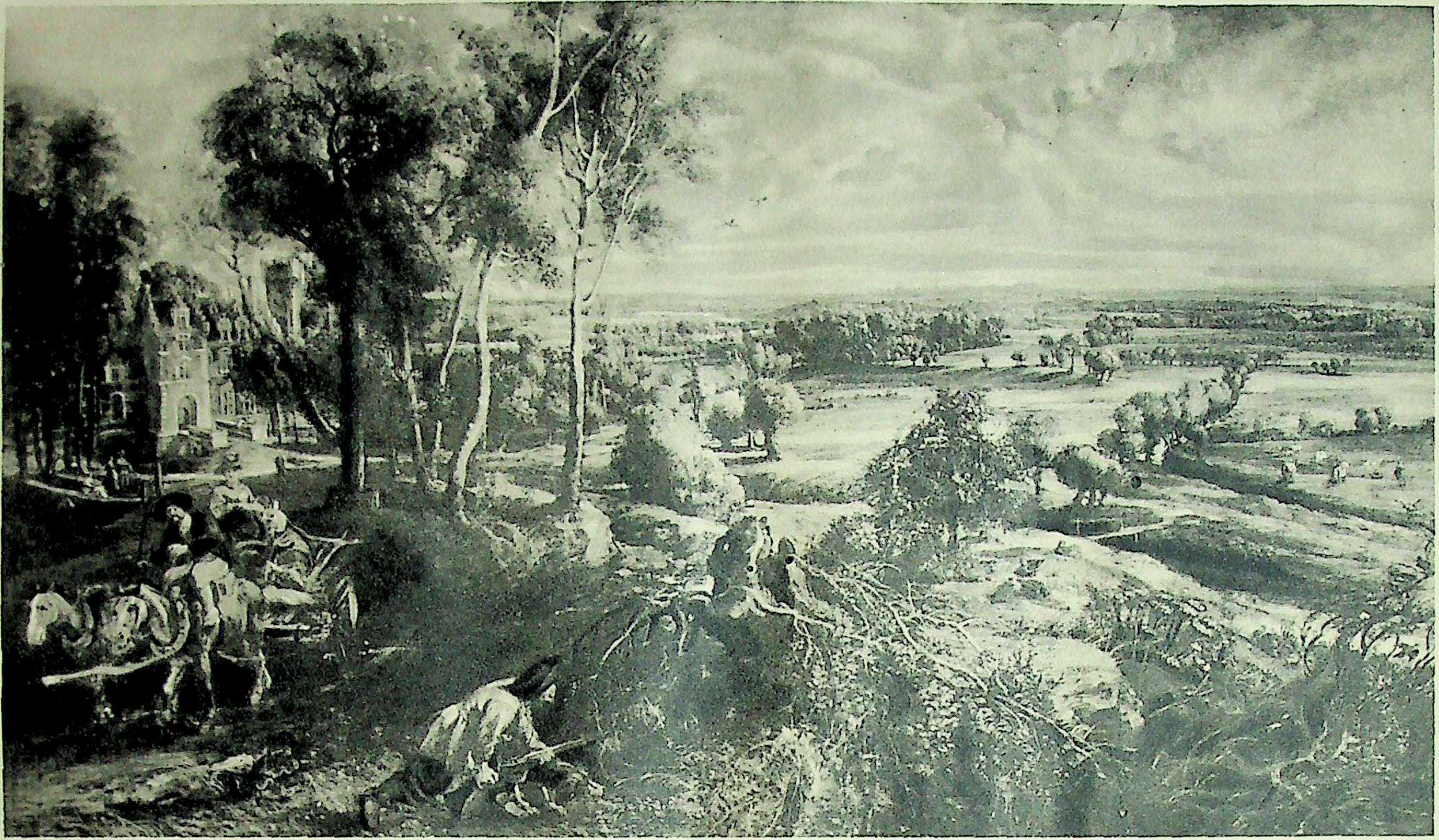
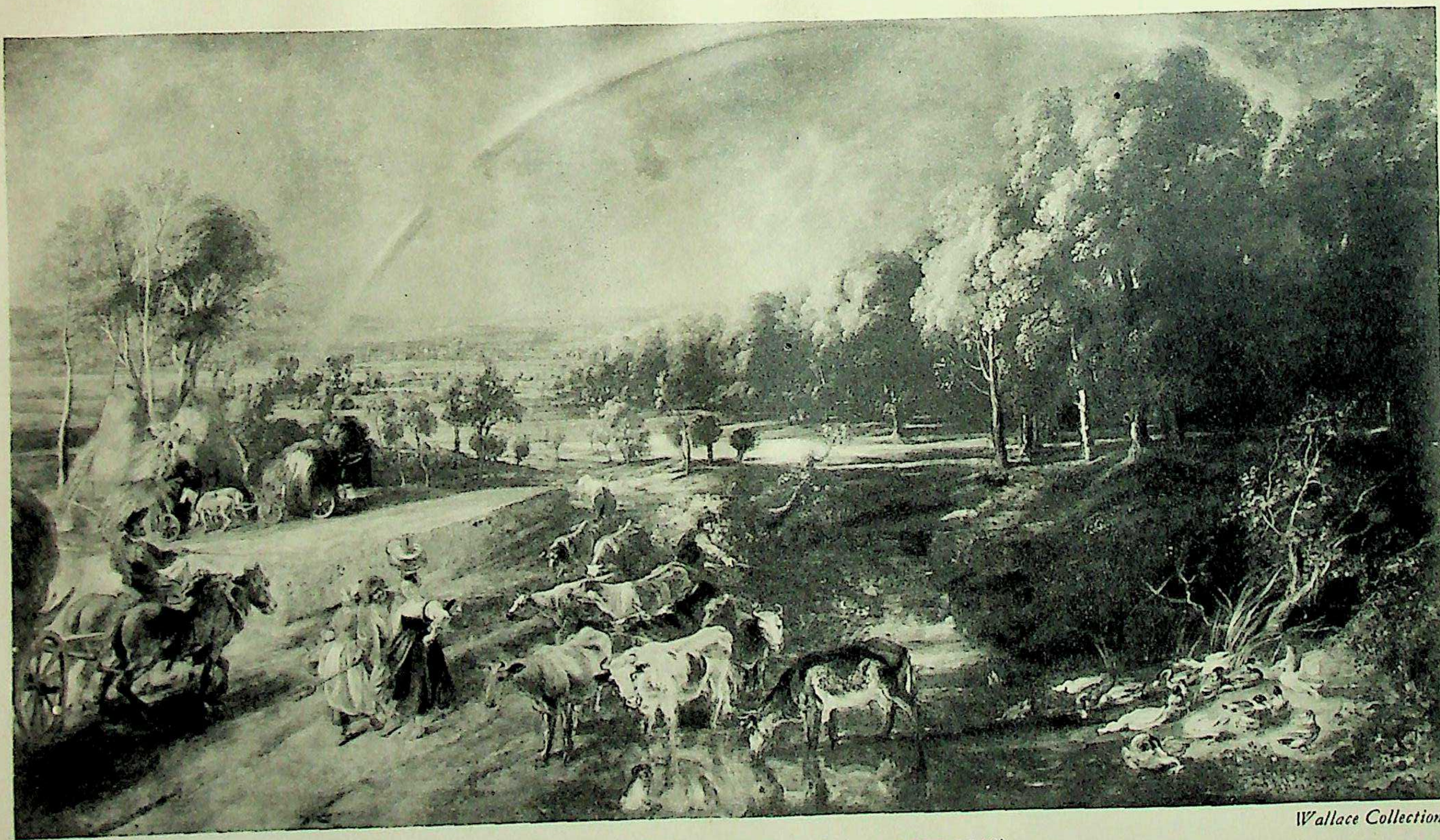


Plate 22 *National Gallery*

THE CHATEAU DE STEEN *By Peter Paul Rubens* (1577-1640)

Original 53″ × 93″



Wallace Collection

Plate 23

THE RAINBOW *By Peter Paul Rubens* (1577-1640)

Original 53″ × 92″

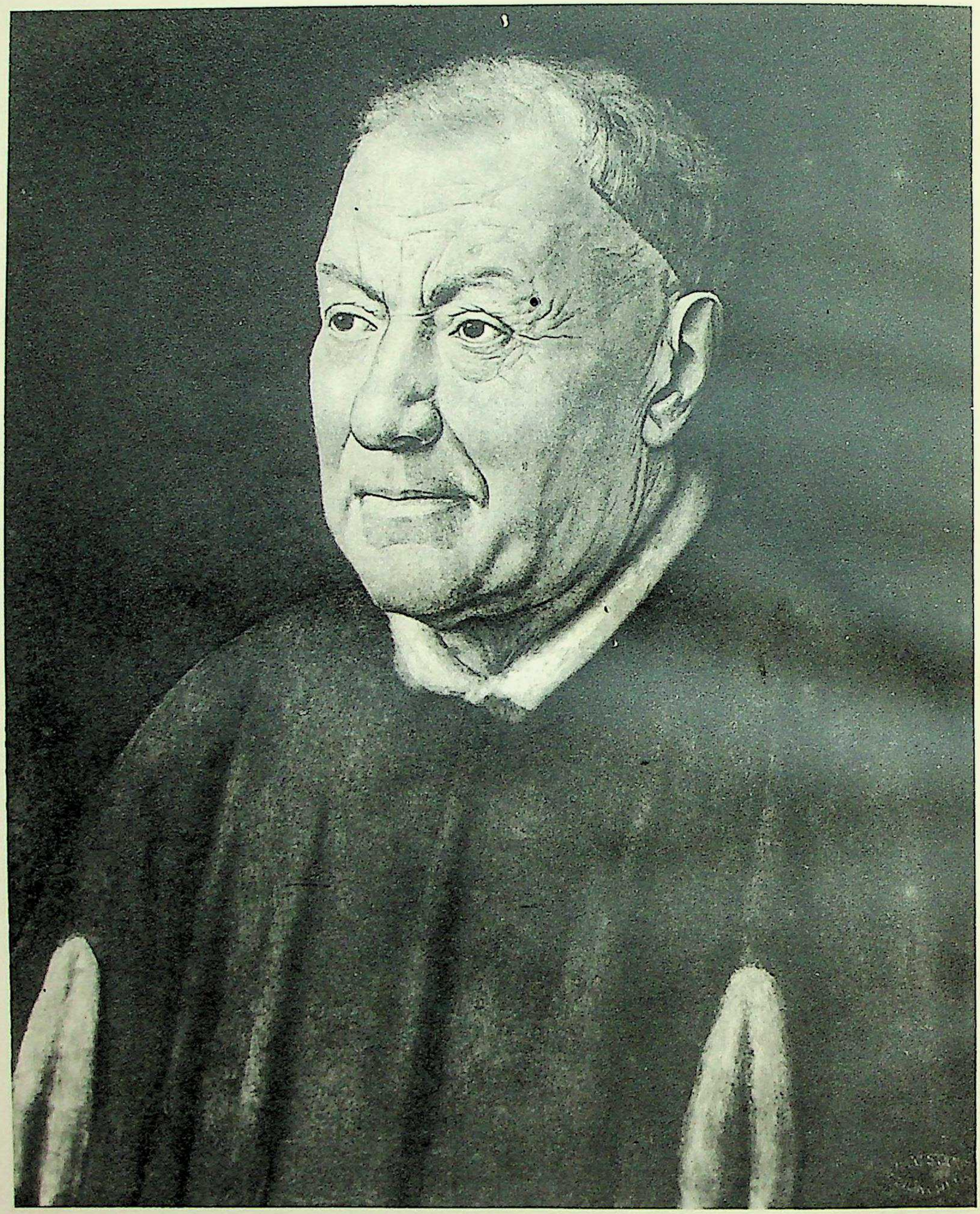


Plate 24 *Vienna*

PORTRAIT OF CARDINAL ALBERGATI *By Jan van Eyck* (*c*.1380-1441)

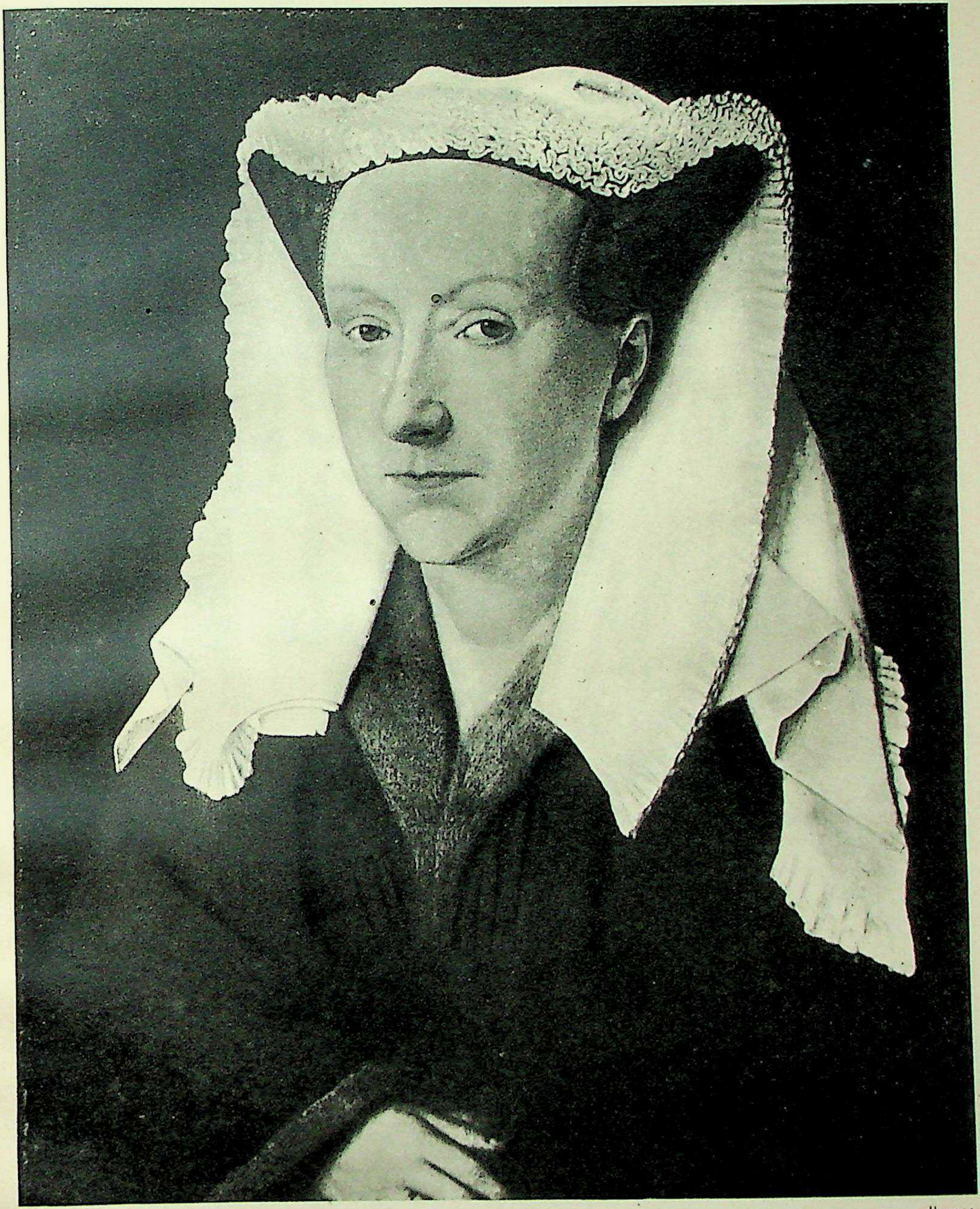


Plate 25 Bruges

PORTRAIT OF HIS WIFE *By Jan van Eyck* (*c.*1380-1441)

Original 13″ × 10¼″

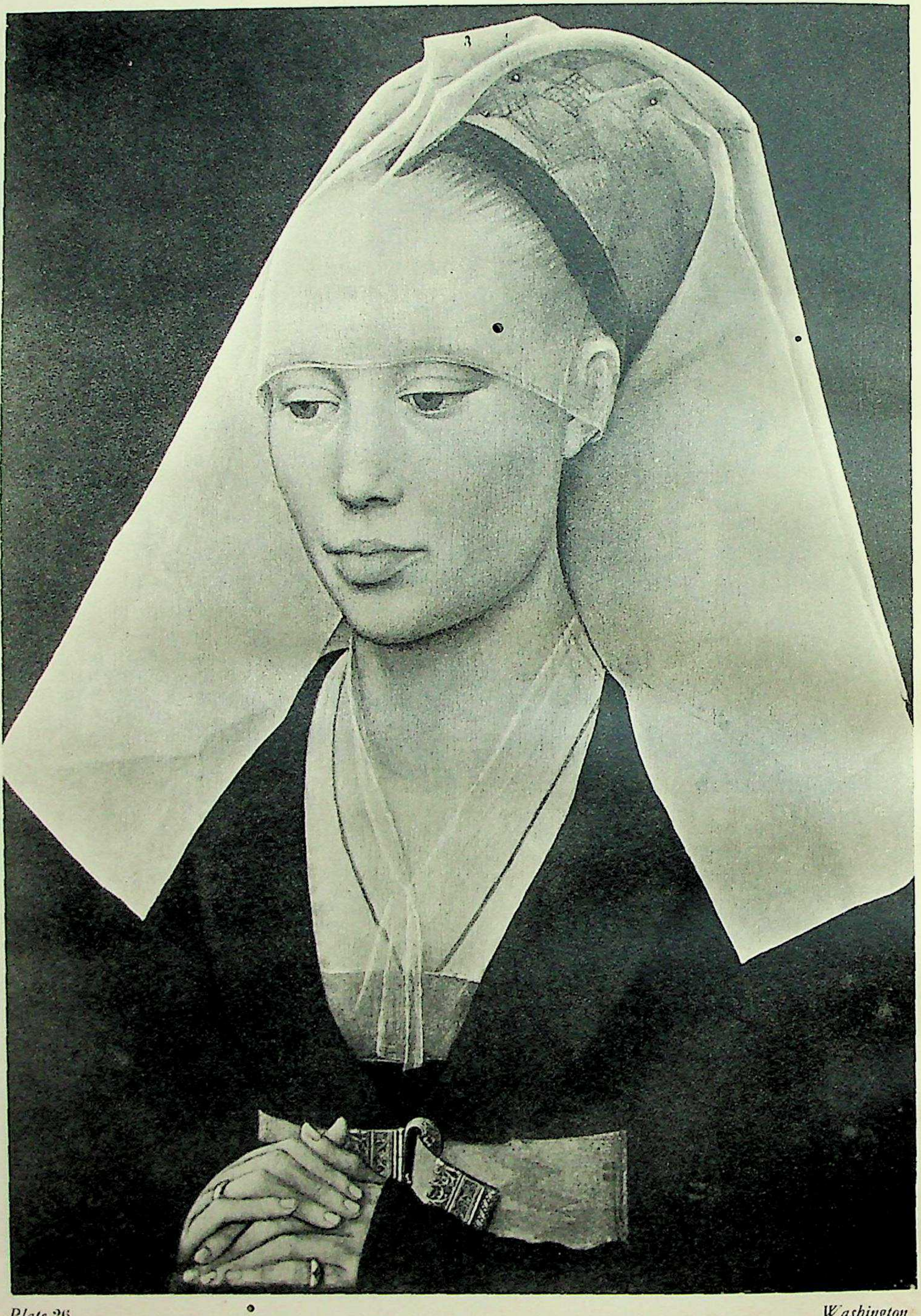
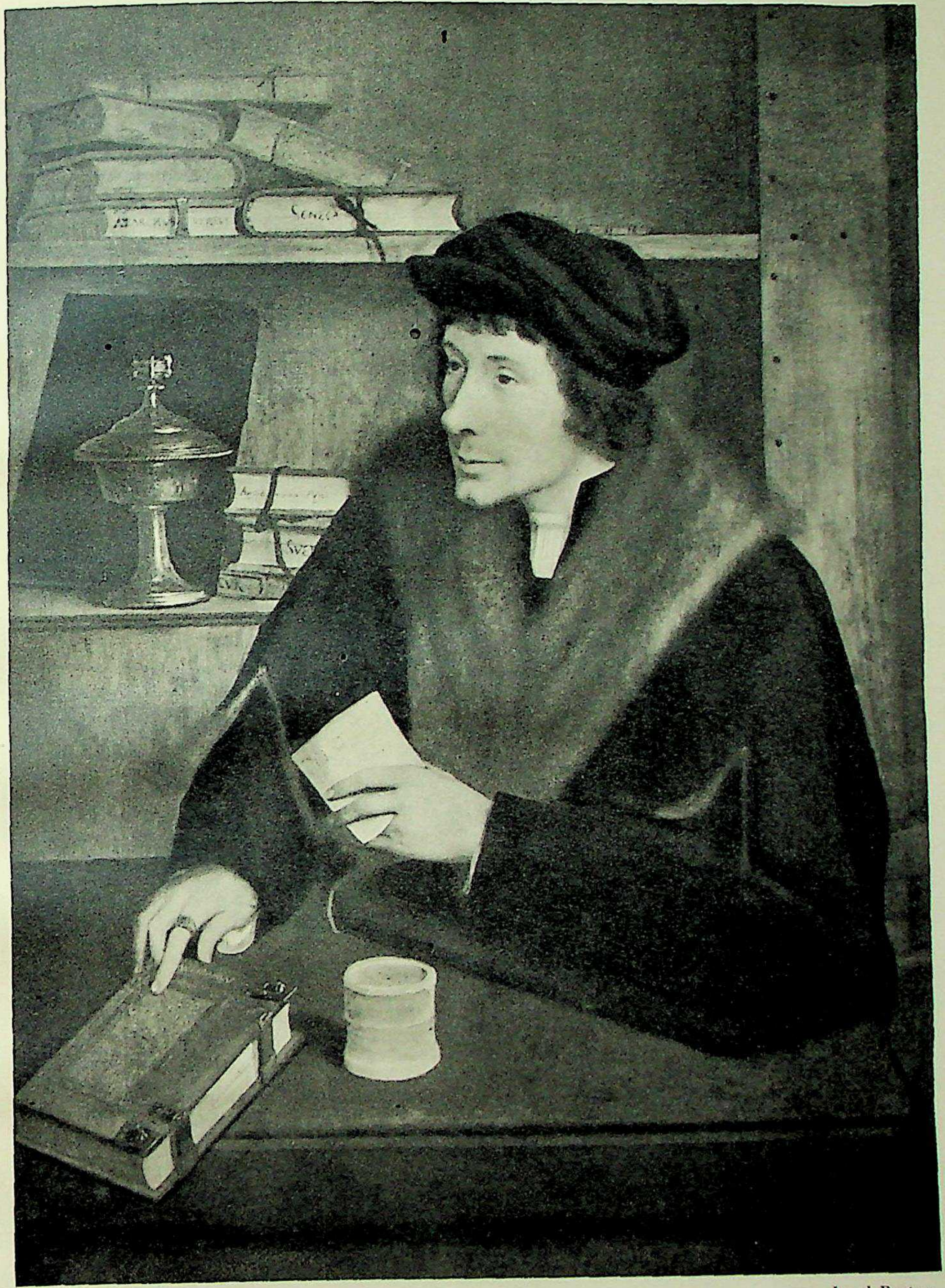


Plate 26 *Washington*

PORTRAIT OF A LADY *By Roger van der Weyden* (1400-1464)

Original 14½″ × 10½″



Lord Radnor

Plate 27

PORTRAIT OF AEGIDIUS (Peter Gillis) *By Quentin Metsys* (1466-1530)

Original 30″ × 22″

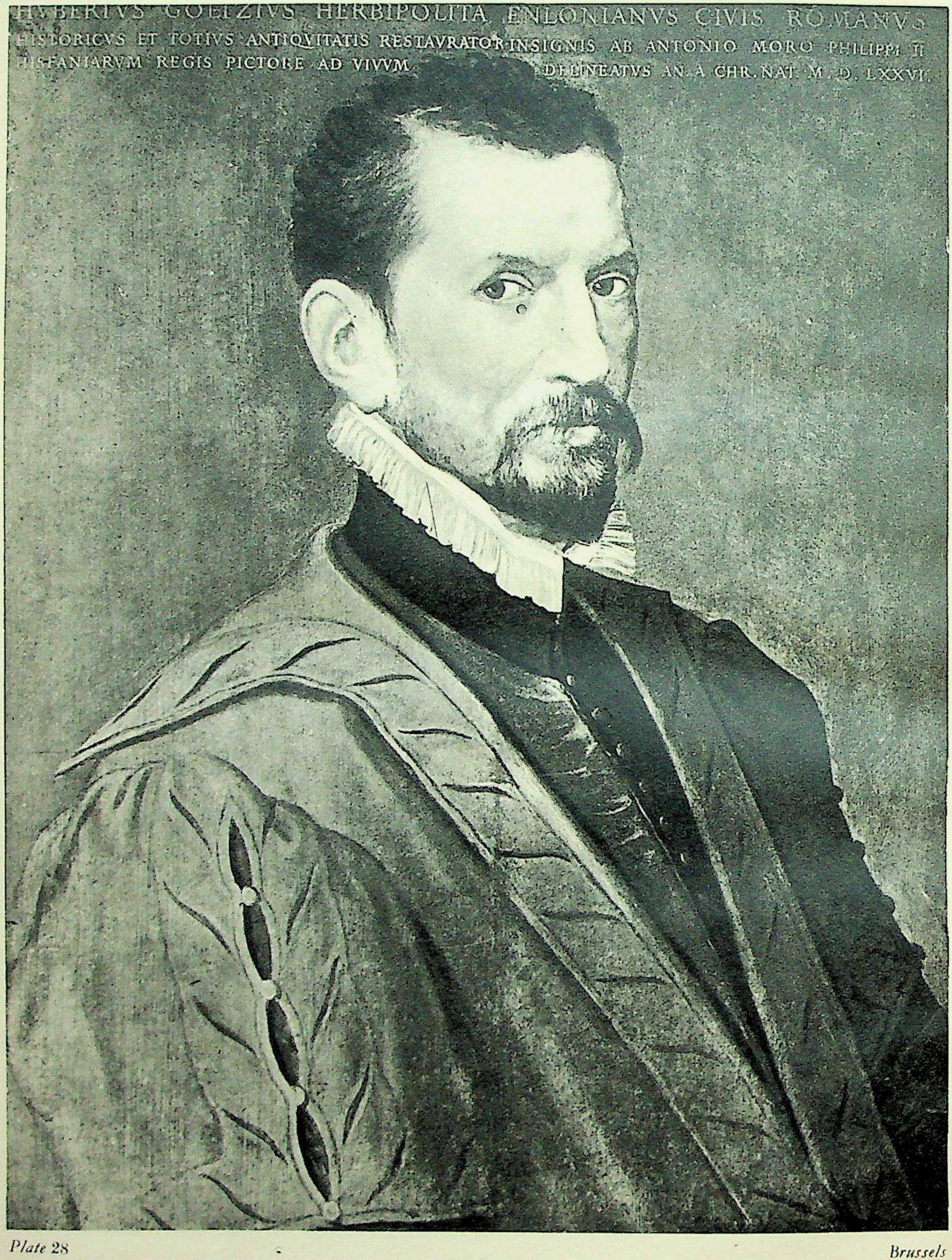

HVBERTVS GOLTZIVS HERBIPOLITA ENLONIANVS CIVIS ROMANVS
HISTORICVS ET TOTIVS ANTIQVITATIS RESTAVRATOR INSIGNIS AB ANTONIO MORO PHILIPPI II
HISPANIARVM REGIS PICTORE AD VIVVM
DELINEATVS AN. A CHR. NAT. M. D. LXXVI.

Plate 28 *Brussels*

PORTRAIT OF HUBERT GOLTZIUS *By Antonio Moro* (*c.*1519-1576)

Original 26″ × 19¾″

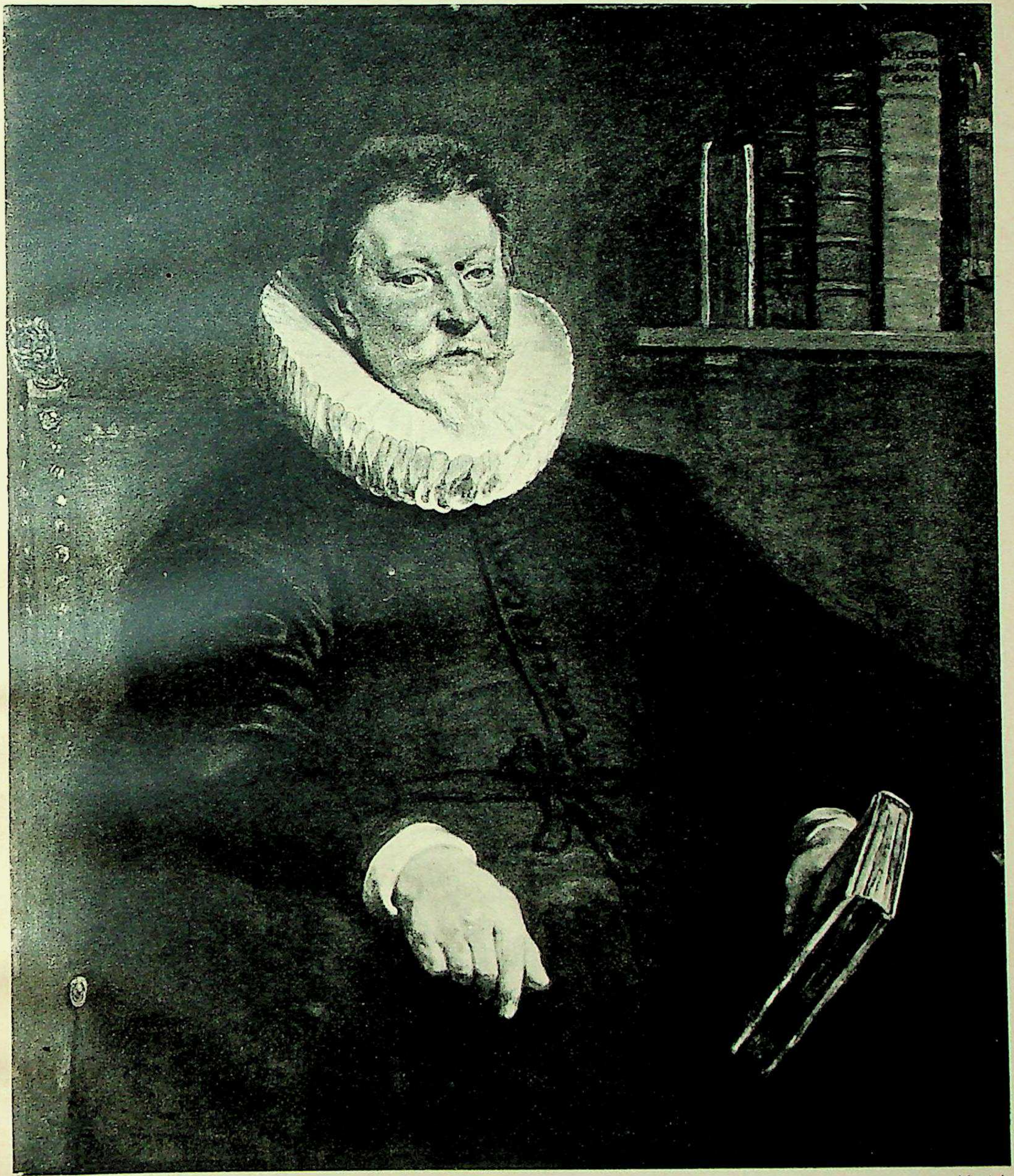


Plate 29

Munich

PORTRAIT OF JAN BRANT *By Peter Paul Rubens* (1577-1640)

Original 43″ × 37″

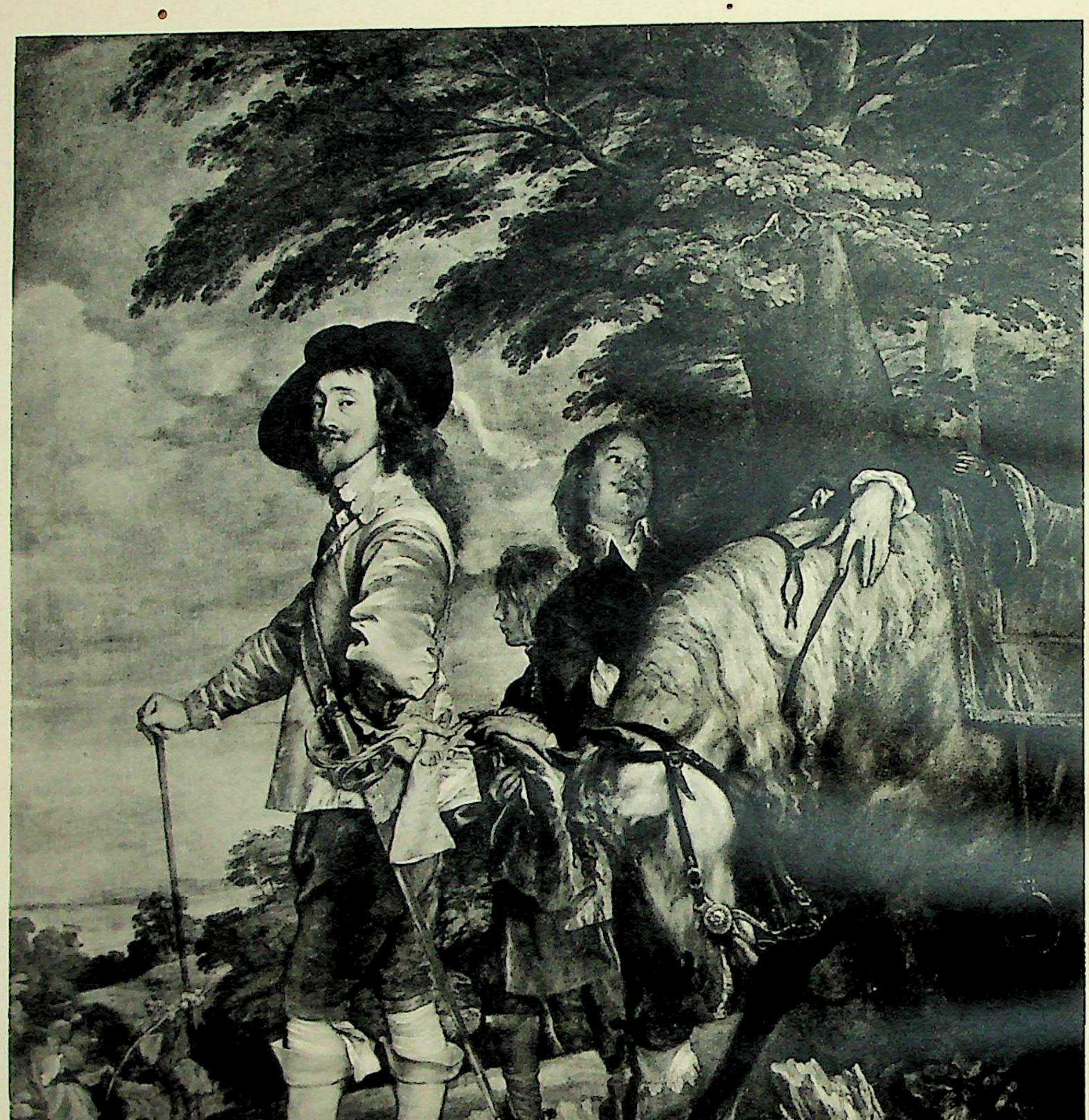


Plate 30

PORTRAIT OF CHARLES I *By Anthony van Dyck* (1599-1641)

Louvre

Original 107″ × 83½″

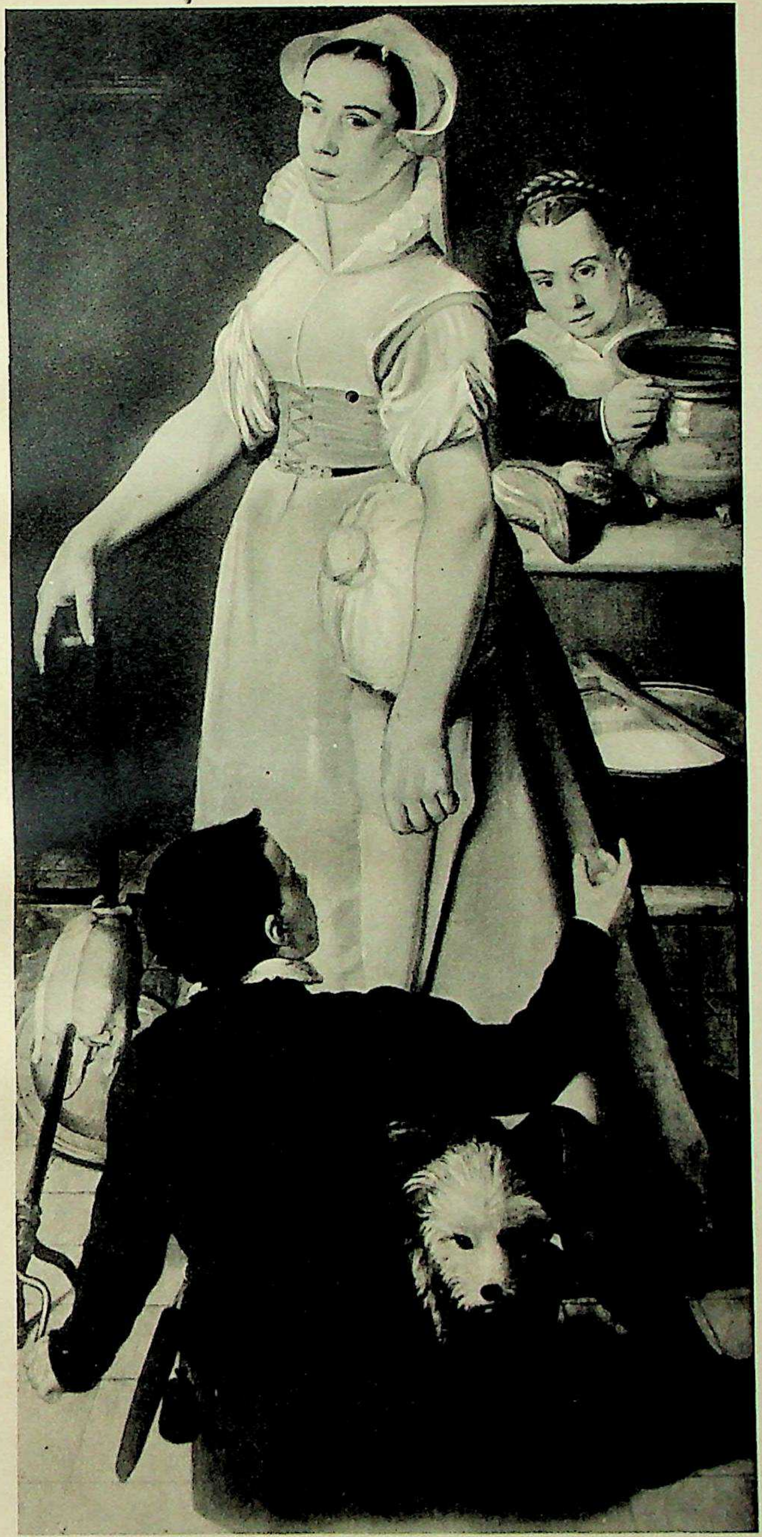


Plate 31 *Antwerp*

THE COOK *By Pieter Aertsen* (1508-1575)

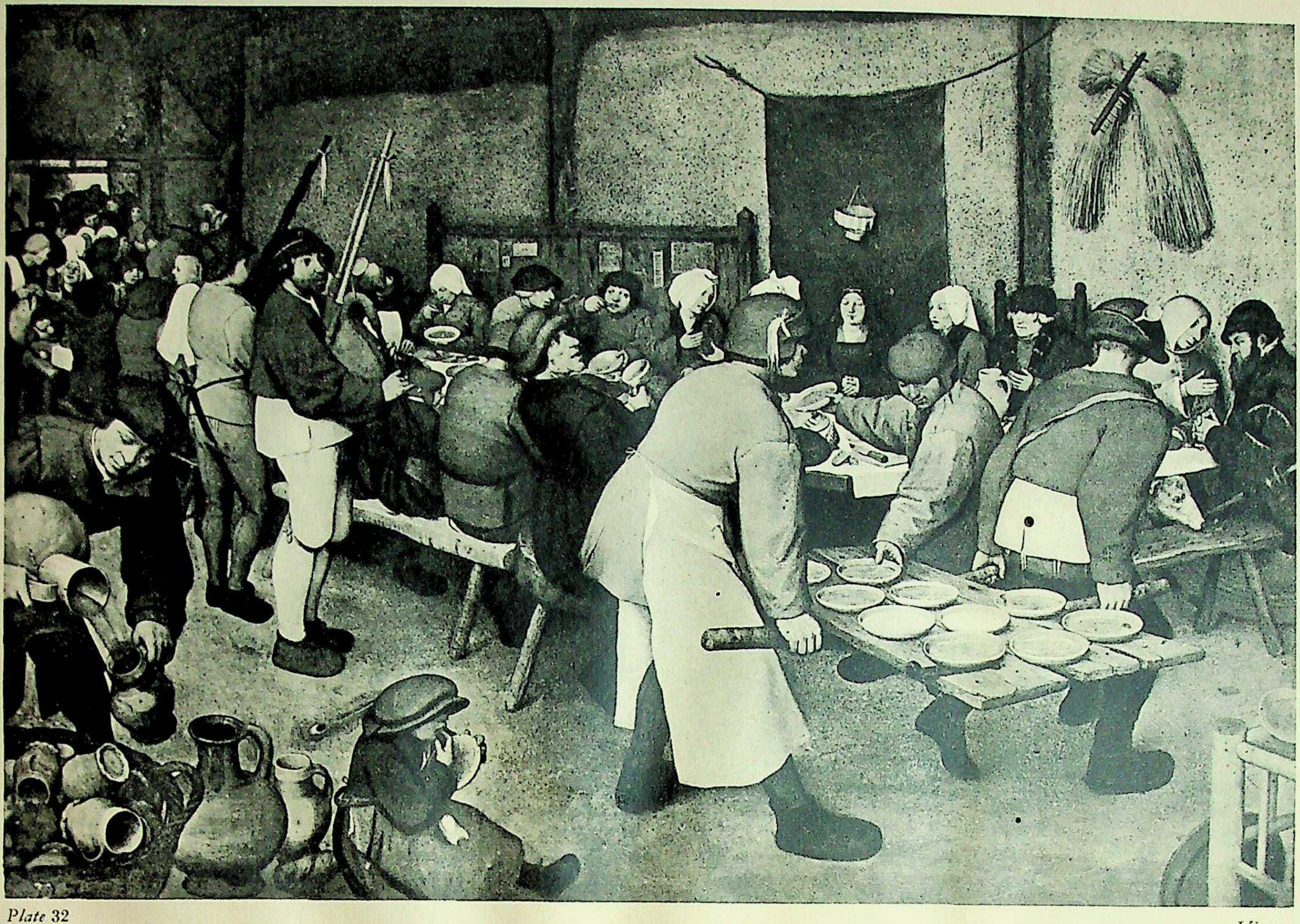


Plate 32

Vienna

THE WEDDING FEAST *By Pieter Brueghel the Elder* (*c.*1525-1569)

Original 45″ × 64″

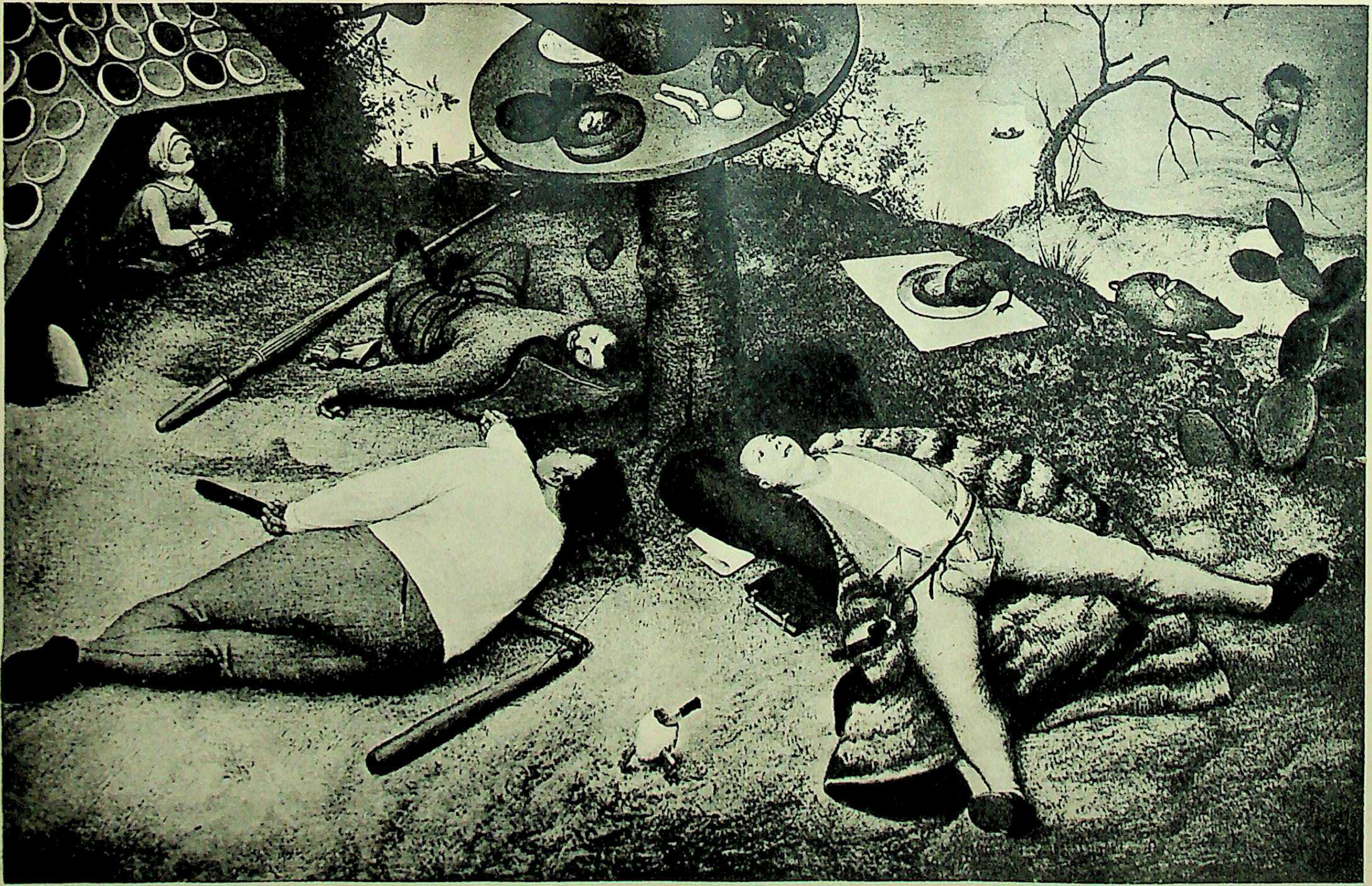


Plate 33 *Berlin*

THE LAND OF COCKAIGNE *By Pieter Brueghel the Elder* (*c.*1525-1569)

Original 20½″ × 30½″

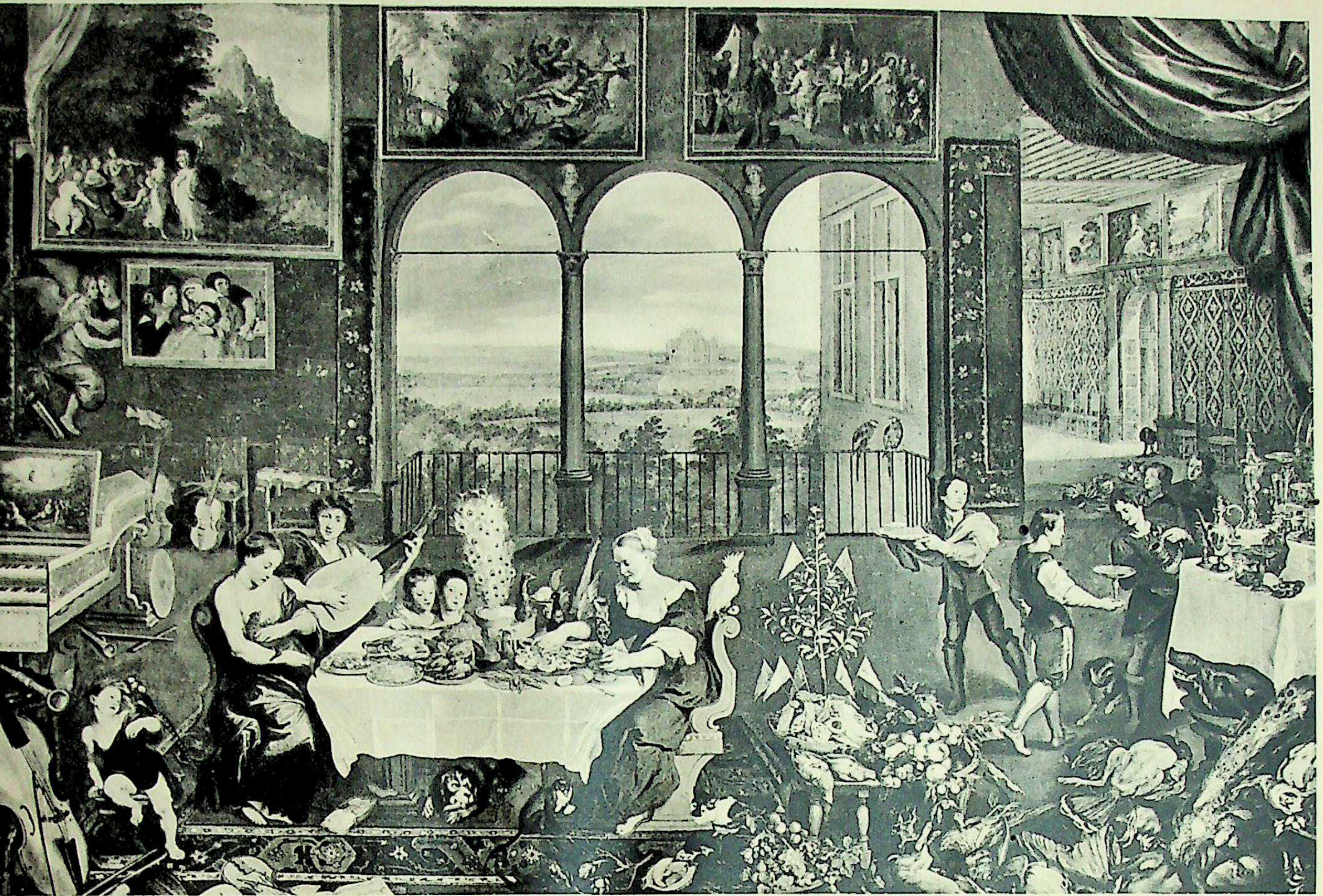


Plate 34

Madrid

THE SENSES OF HEARING, TASTE AND TOUCH *By Jan Brueghel 'the Velvet'* (1568-1625)

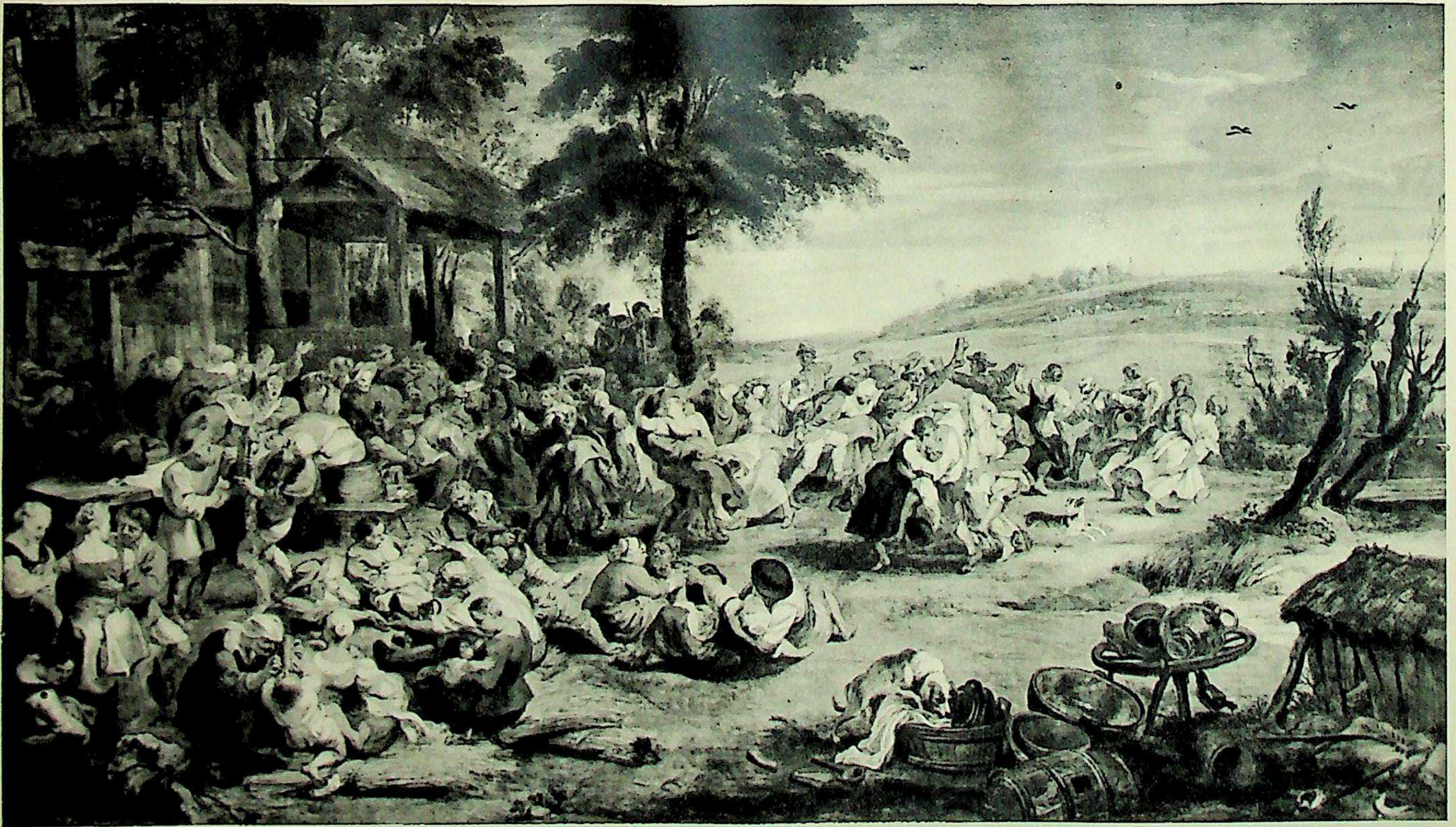


Plate 35

KERMESSE *By Peter Paul Rubens* (1577-1640)

Louvre

Original 58½″ × 103″

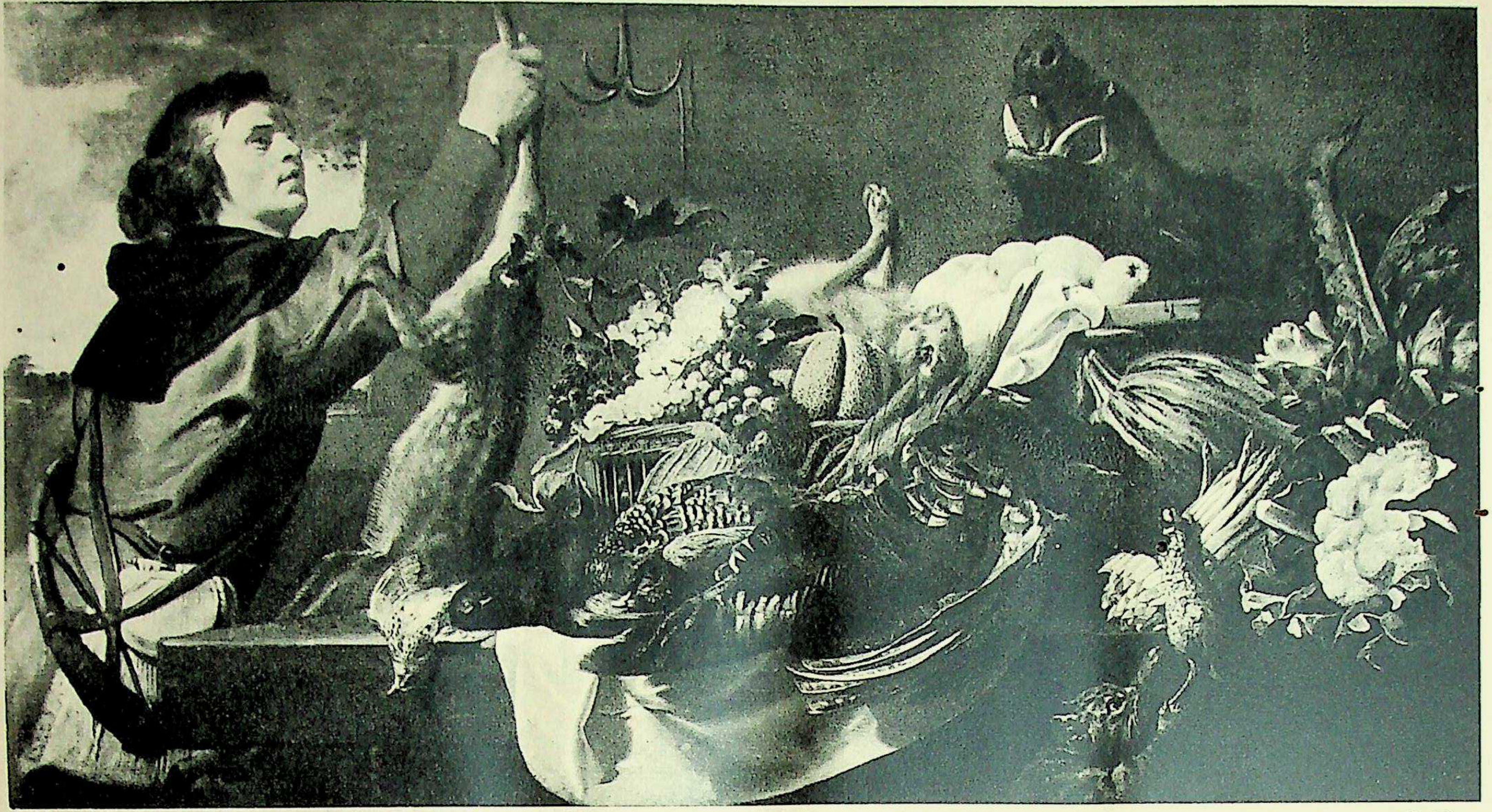
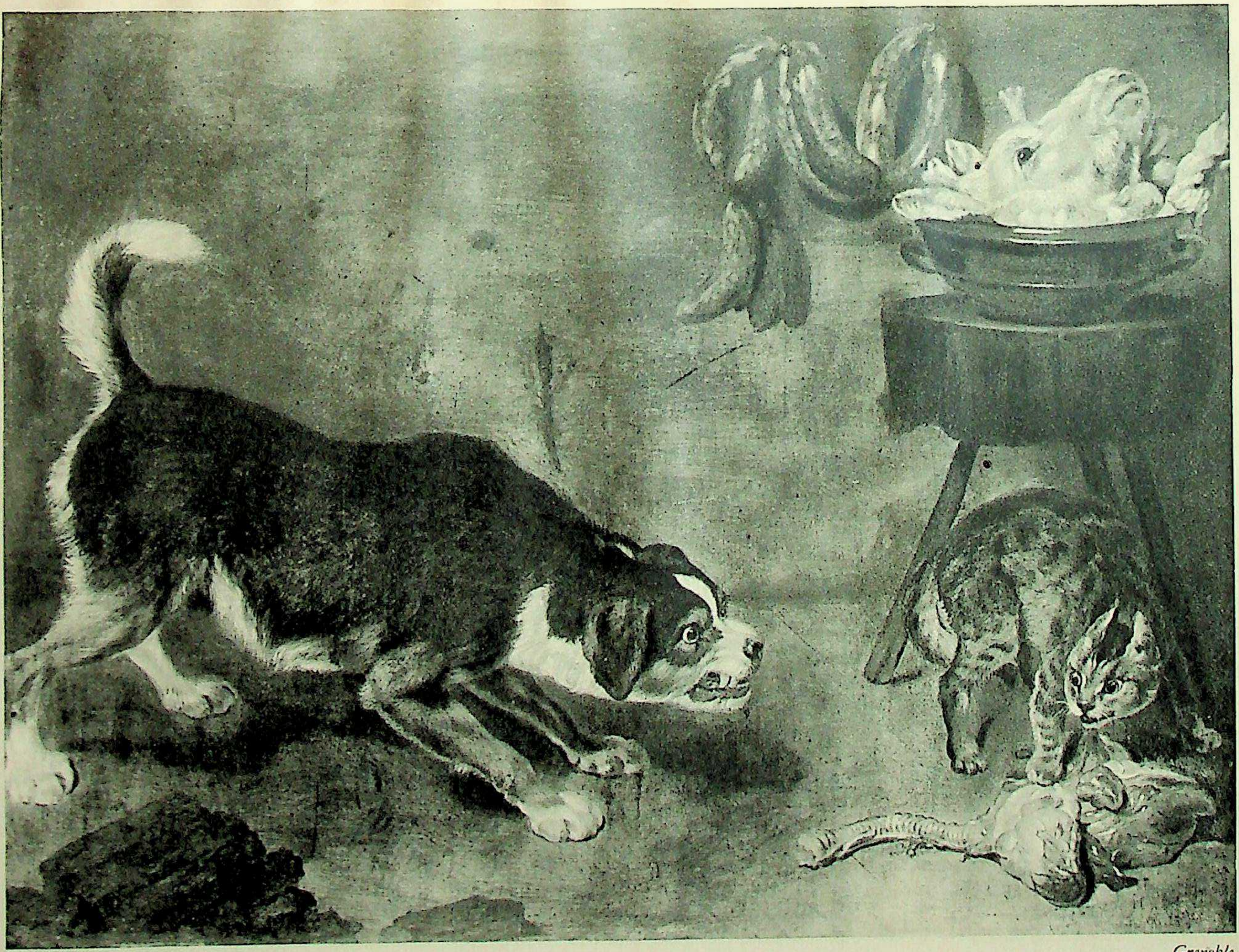


Plate 36

The Hague

STILL LIFE *By Frans Snyders* (1579-1657) and *Anthony van Dyck* (1599-1641)



Grenoble

Plate 37

DOG AND CAT *By Frans Snyders* (1579-1657)

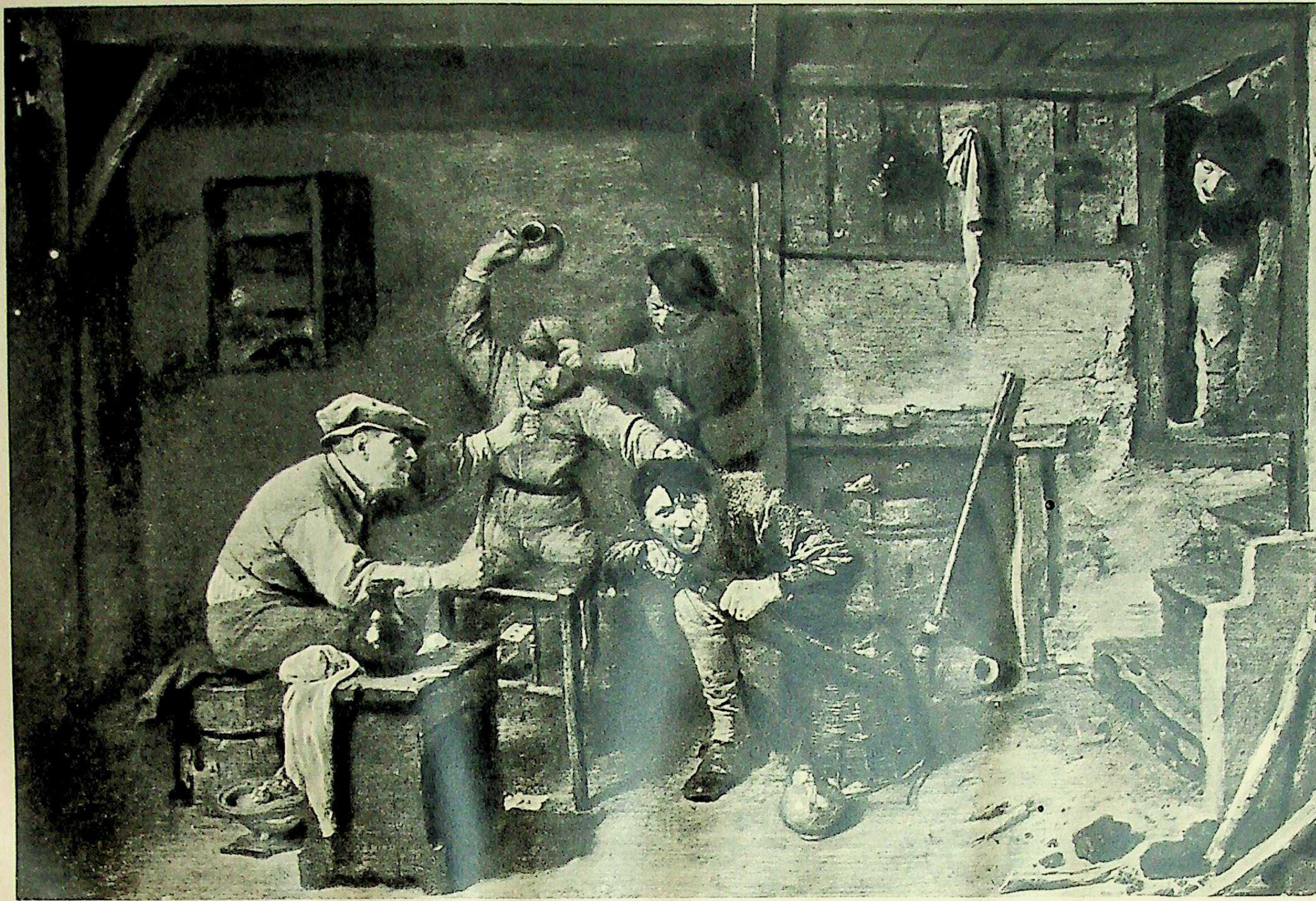
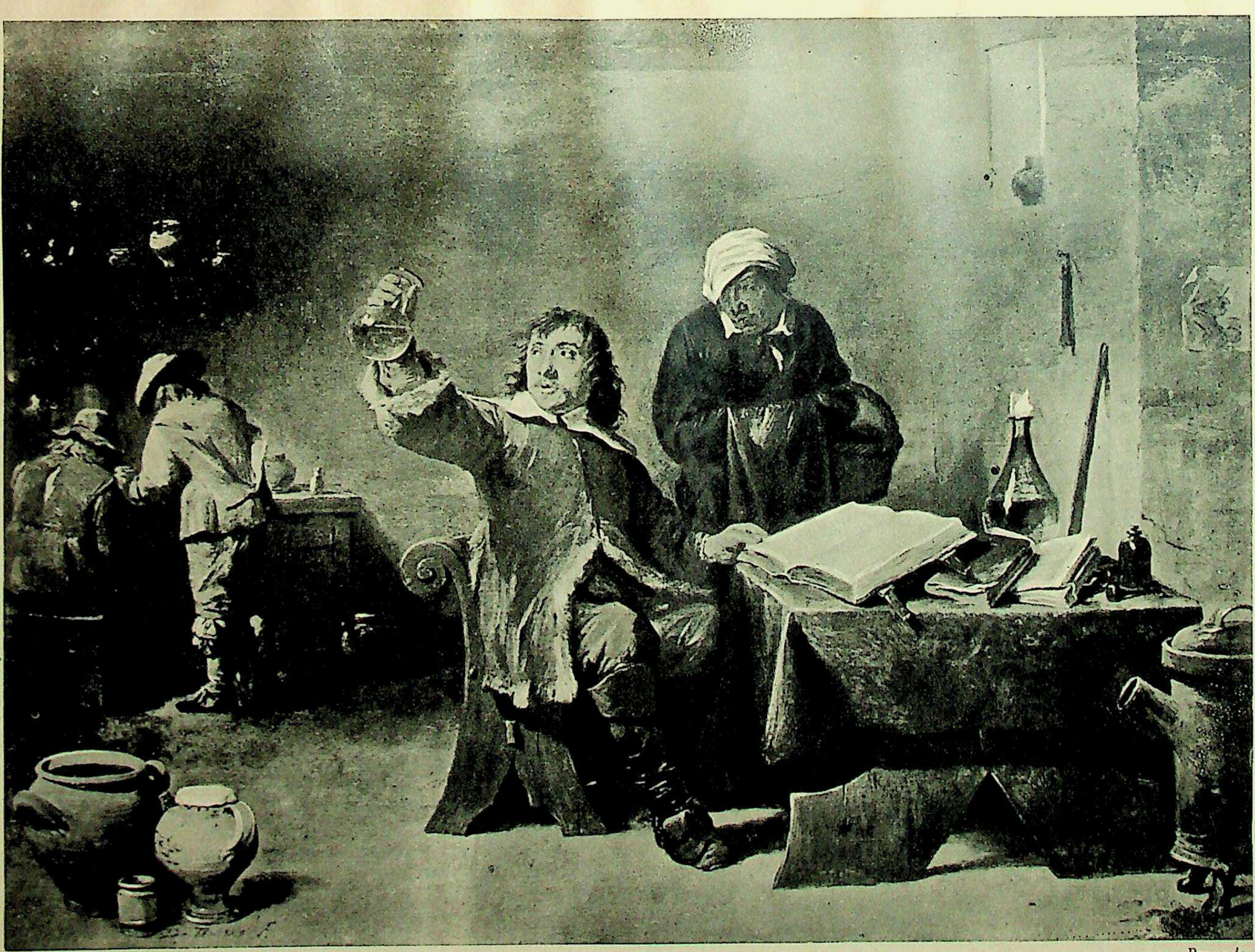


Plate 38 A BRAWL *By Adriaen Brouwer* (1605-1638) *Munich*

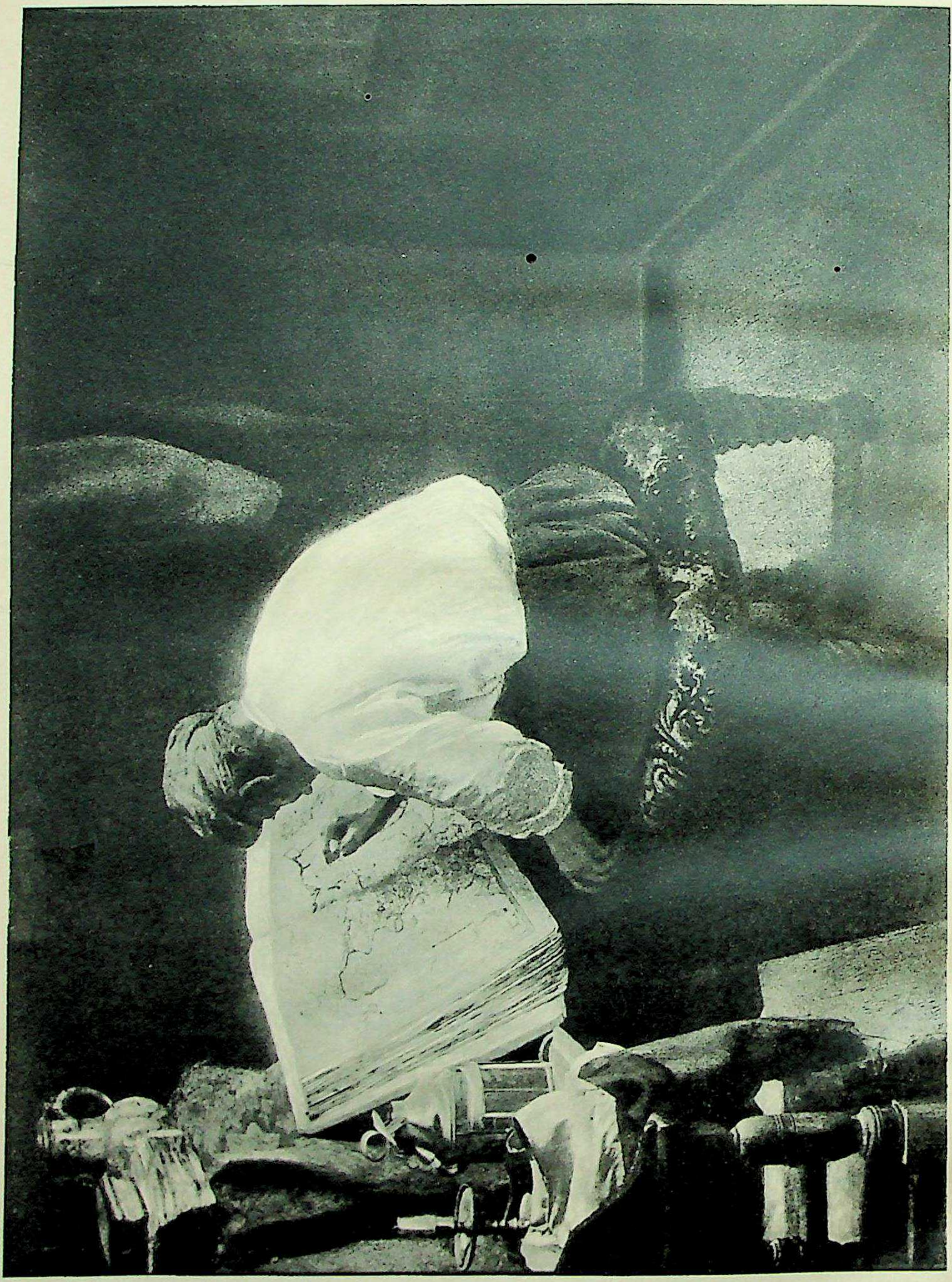


Brussels

Plate 39

THE VILLAGE DOCTOR *By David Teniers* (1610-1690)

Original 10″ × 13″



Brussels

THE GEOGRAPHER *By Henri de Braekeleer* (1840-1888)

Plate 40

Original 24″ × 31½″

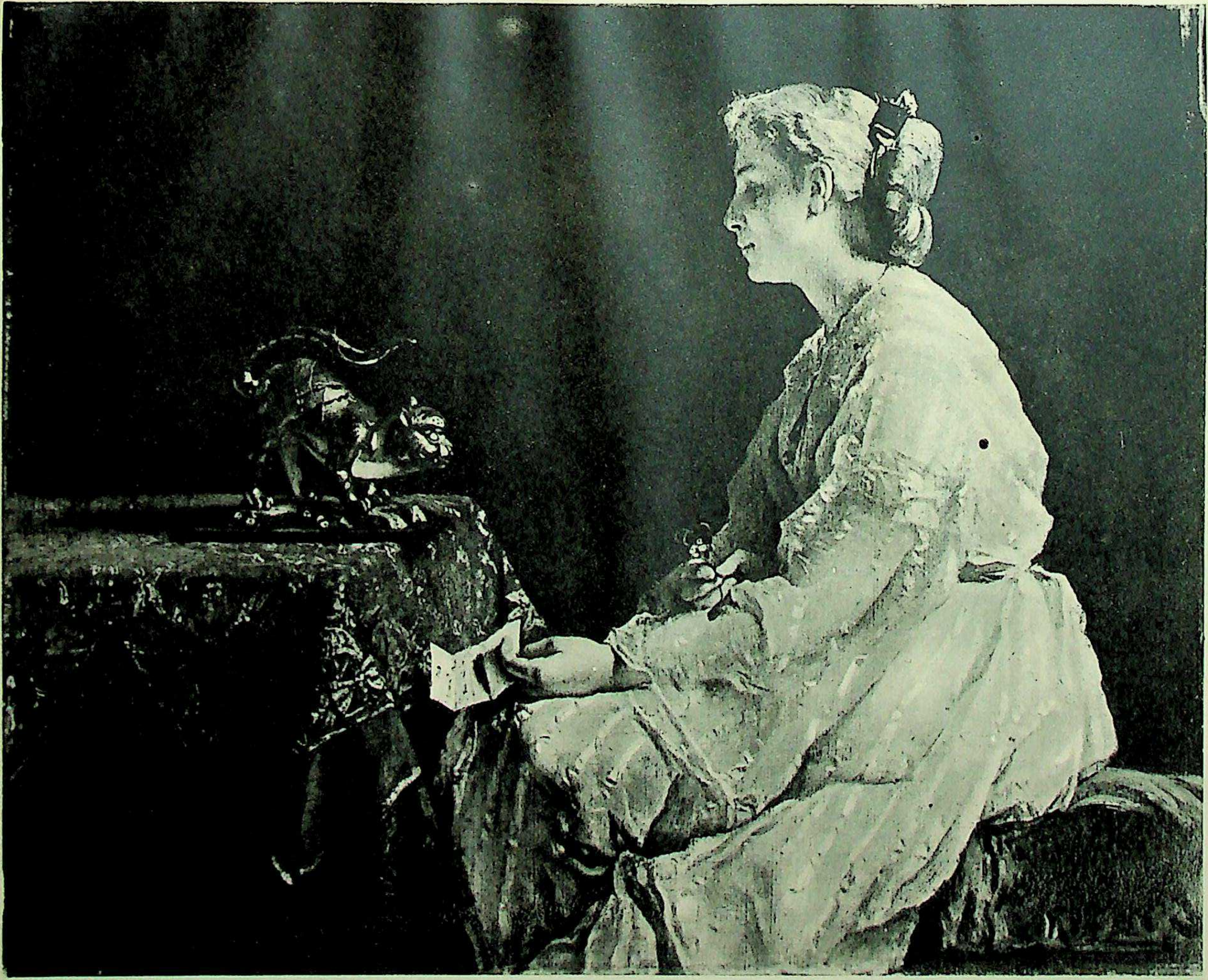


Plate 41

Tate Gallery

THE PRESENT *By Alfred Stevens* (1828-1906)

Original 14¼″ × 18½″

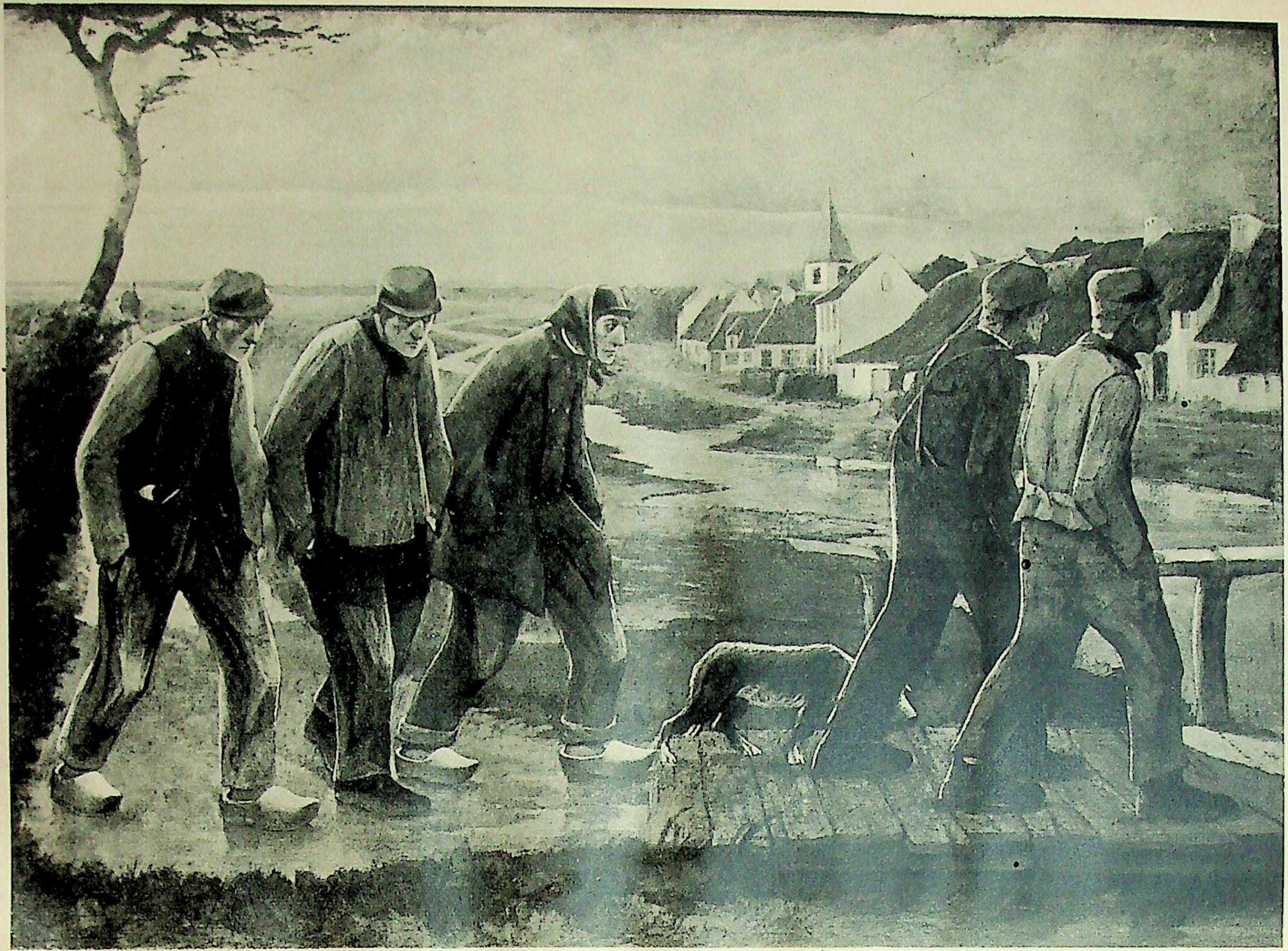


Plate 42

Brussels

RETURN FROM THE FIELDS *By Eugene Laermans* (1864-1940)

Original 44″ × 59½″

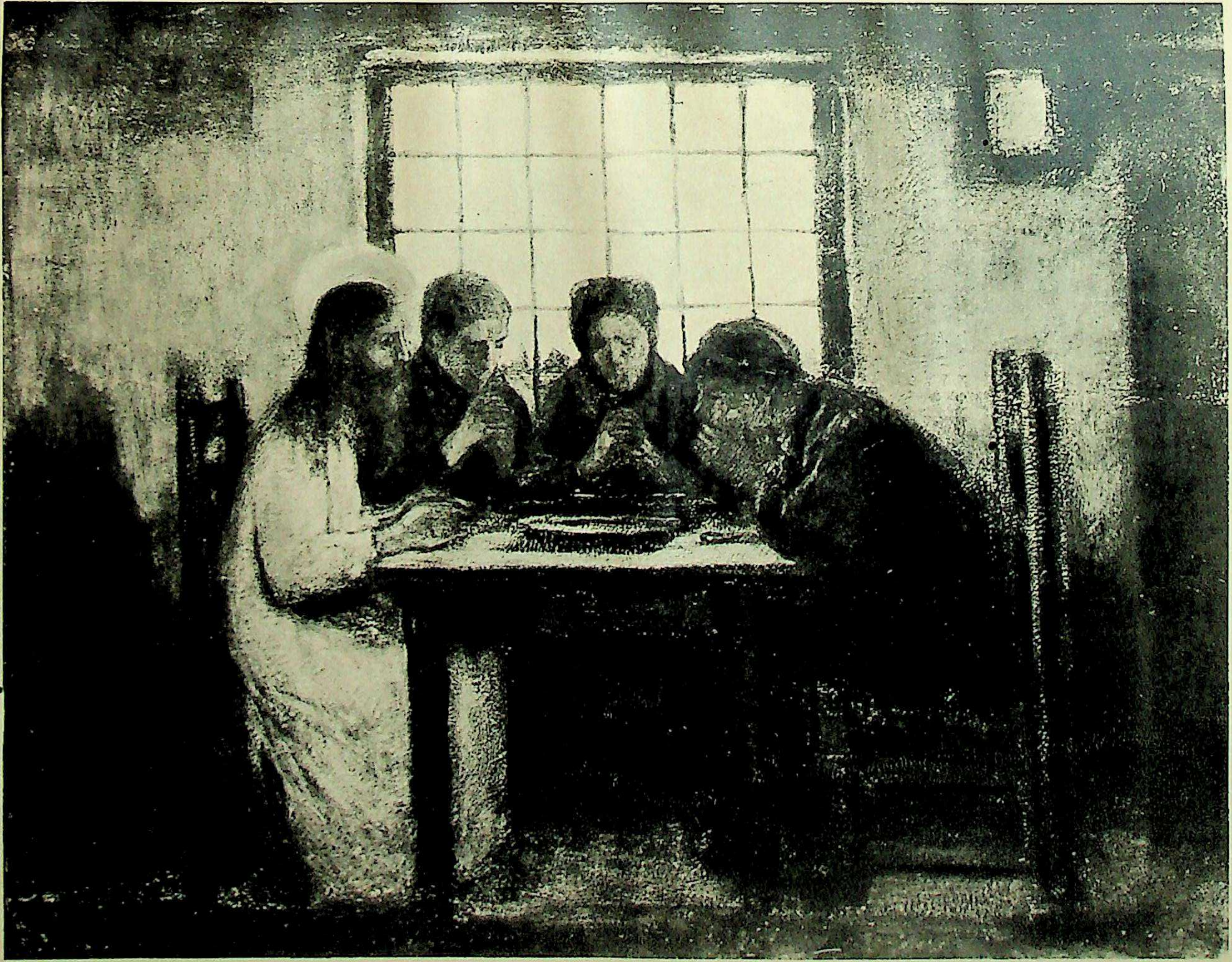


Plate 43

Brussels

THE SPIRIT OF EAST FLANDERS *By Jacob Smits* (1856-1928)

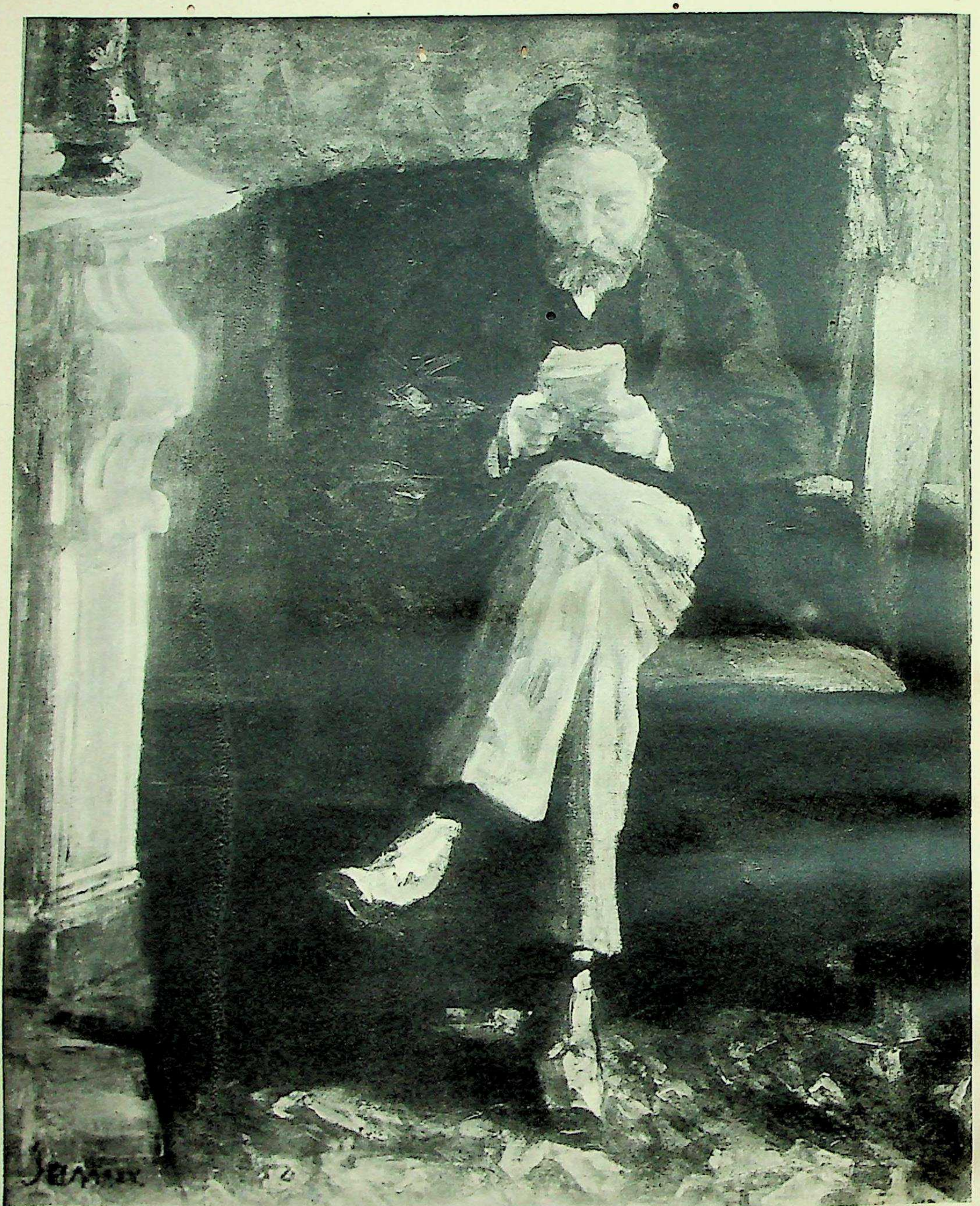


Plate 44

Brussels

THE ARTIST'S FATHER *By James Ensor* (*born* 1860)

Original 39½″ × 31½″

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